

Epistemic Responsibility

Lorraine Code

With a New Preface by the Author

EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

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Lorraine Code

SUNY
P R E S S

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*To the memory of my father, who might, I think,
have shared some of these concerns*

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

I begin with a certain temerity on an autobiographical note, sketching some of the reasons that prompted me to write a book called *Epistemic Responsibility* in the 1980s, after completing a PhD with a dissertation titled “Knowledge and Subjectivity.” The dissertation topic did not lead directly into thoughts about epistemic responsibility since the concept was not then so central a part of the philosophical lexicon as it briefly came to be, and as it is again reclaiming explanatory space. Yet a rigorous if short-lived exchange assessing its “scope and limits,” in the late 1970s and early 1980s, prompted me to take it up in ways its then-articulators subsequently ceased to pursue, perhaps for reasons of its apparent fluidity, its lack of conceptual rigor, and/or its uneasy fit within then-current epistemological orthodoxy. For my work, it was the missing piece in a range of issues I was thinking about without having the conceptual resources to articulate them.

Briefly to rehearse some moments in a relatively short-lived debate in Anglo-American philosophy then, consider the following: In 1974, asking “How Do You Know?” Ernest Sosa suggests that on occasion, a resort to neglectful data collection resulting in lack of knowledge, “could be traced back to epistemic irresponsibility”: to substandard performance attributable to the investigator.¹ More centrally inspirational for how I continued is Laurence Bonjour’s 1978 observation: “Cognitive doings are

¹Ernest Sosa, “How Do You Know?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11:1, 1974, p. 117. See also Sosa “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* V, 1980.

epistemically justified, on this conception, only if and to the extent that they are aimed at this goal—which means roughly that one accepts all and only beliefs which one has good reason to think are true. To accept a belief in the absence of such a reason, however appealing or even mandatory such acceptance may be from other standpoints, is to neglect the pursuit of truth; such an acceptance is, one might say, *epistemically irresponsible*. My contention is that the idea of being epistemically responsible is the core concept of epistemic justification.”² Yet, according to Hilary Kornblith, Bonjour is presupposing that there is a free choice of belief: thus, that fulfilling one’s epistemic responsibilities is a matter of following certain rules of ideal reasoning: an assumption he rejects.³ Nevertheless, he argues persuasively in favour of judging epistemic conduct responsible or irresponsible: he is a principal contributor to this line of thinking. In this 1983 essay, Kornblith suggests that often when someone wonders whether a belief is *justified*, she/he is asking, “whether the belief is the product of *epistemically responsible action*.” Such questions, he notes, are about the ethics of belief. He stops short, however, of claiming that beliefs are freely chosen *tout court*, concentrating rather on questions about how “truth seekers ought to comport themselves.”

Referring to the epistemically responsible agent, he argues: “It is not that one has a choice in the beliefs that one forms, but that one has a say in the procedures one undertakes that lead to their formation.” Hence, he is critical of an epistemological focus on proper reasoning to the exclusion of considering how evidence is gathered; maintaining that being epistemically responsible is about engaging in appropriate knowledge-seeking procedures. Similarly, John Heil focuses on a tension between regarding believers as active doxastic agents who are responsible for what they believe, and believers as being “at the mercy of

²Lawrence Bonjour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation? *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15:1, 1978, 1–13, p. 5.

³Hilary Kornblith, “Justified Belief and Epistemically Responsible Action” *The Philosophical Review* 92:1, 1983, fn. 1, p. 34.

their belief-forming equipment”: as passive.⁴ He concludes that a need to avoid voluntarism in knowledge/belief formation leaves space for speaking of epistemic responsibility and agency only if the focus shifts to the ways in which “agents . . . select belief-generating procedures” (p. 363).

As this small sampling indicates, discussions of epistemic responsibility did claim a place, then, in mainstream American epistemology. Perhaps they failed to play a more central part in consequence of their uneasy positioning in relation to the post-positivist rigor that continued to govern epistemology, or in consequence of their departure from deductive-nomological analysis. More plausible an explanation is/was their stark *individualism*, which sustains settled practices of failing to take subjectivity into account.⁵ It is difficult—even incongruous—to talk about responsibilities in relation to knowing chairs and tables, even though in some situations it may matter. Nevertheless, once knowledge seeking is recognized as a cooperative-collaborative, textured human practice, it is vital to keep in mind Anne Seller’s emblematic affirmation: “As an isolated individual, I often do not know what my experiences are.”⁶ These, in condensed form, are among the ideas that, in my view, affirmed the centrality of such issues.

In writing *Epistemic Responsibility* in the 1980s, I was attempting to fill a gap I could neither name nor describe—a gap where evaluative and interpretive judgements could find no place, seemingly because they could not “boil down” to simple true-or-false empirical propositional claims; nor did they admit of true-or-false evaluations—say, of nuance or relevance. Most crucially, inquiry that starts from (perhaps tacit) questions about epistemic responsibility

⁴John Heil, “Doxastic Agency,” *Philosophical Studies* 43:3, May 1983, p. 363.

⁵See Lorraine Code, “Taking Subjectivity Into Account.” In Linda Alcoff & Elizabeth Potter, eds., *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Reprint Ann Garry & Marilyn Pearsall, eds., *Women, Knowledge and Reality*. Second edition. New York: Routledge, 1996.

⁶Anne Seller, “Realism versus Relativism: Toward a Politically Adequate Epistemology.” In Morwenna Griffiths & Margaret Whitford, eds., *Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, 180.

requires engaging with subjectivity/subjectivities: it is about working to understand, assessing and (often hermeneutically) engaging with issues about the place of subjectivity/subjectivities in knowledge-making, -constructing, and -evaluating processes. It is about the ethics and politics of knowledge, and indeed about epistemic subjectivity in its multiple modalities. Moreover, given that talk of responsibility in its literal modalities commonly, if implicitly, refers to human agency, it clearly requires what I have called “Taking Subjectivity Into Account”:⁷ starting from understandings of epistemic *subjectivity/subjectivities* more diverse and more complex than that of the standard, unidentified occupant of the *S* place, in “*S* knows that *p*” assertions allows. My aim was to claim space for the concept and the practices it could inform in knowledge acquisition, development, evaluation, and circulation by bringing the epistemic subject out of hiding:⁸ acknowledging the incongruity embedded in habits of working from a systemic failure to recognize that talk about responsibility without directing adequate attention to *the knower(s)*—to the potentially responsible or irresponsible epistemic agents involved—is indeed futile.

Space did have to be claimed, for in the then (and often still now) “instituted” Anglo-American epistemic imaginary, talk about responsible epistemic conduct and its implications for knowing well was conceptually at odds with received approaches to established epistemic practice.⁹ This incongruity is apparent in the examples I have cited from epistemologists who were working on such issues, then. In an entrenched preoccupation with determining how *S* can know that *p* there was no ready conceptual framework for assessing the variability, tonality, and situation-specificity of a range of putative knowers or of certain claims,

⁷Lorraine Code, “Taking Subjectivity Into Account.” In Ann Garry & Marilyn Pearsall, eds., *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge 1996, 191–221.

⁸The reference is to José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. New York: Oxford, 2013, p. 133, with thanks to Gaile Pohlhaus.

⁹Owing to Ernest Sosa’s (and others’) reading of the manuscript, *Epistemic Responsibility* found its way into print and was awarded a Brown University First Book prize, with a one-semester teaching and research fellowship at Brown.

which nonetheless merit the label “knowledge.” Nor was it easy to detach references to subjectivity from a then-pressing worry about epistemic inquiry resorting to a defense of subjectivism or to a chapter in the sociology of knowledge. In short, appeals to necessary and sufficient conditions were inadequate to naming the task that investigations into such situated, contextualized responsibilities required.

Thus in claiming significance for “epistemic responsibility,” the book brought a sideways/oblique conceptual frame into the going discourse, albeit tentatively and uneasily: uptake was, and persisted in being, rare. There was no space within the going conceptual repertoire of received Anglo-American epistemology to introduce, and to anticipate a hearing for, speaking about matters of responsibility within the formal repertoire of analytic/Anglo-American theories of knowledge, then. In part owing to an implicit but firm separation of epistemology from ethics, politics, and ontology in received inquiry, these proposals were commonly heard as moves toward a descent into incoherence. Again, partly owing to the principled absence of any real “knower(s)” from epistemic inquiry, it seemed that knowledge-claims had to be made from nowhere and into a void, with no hearers, validators, deliberators, naysayers playing any part in the scenario: no one appropriately to be judged responsible or irresponsible. In short, the received Anglo-American epistemic imaginary lacked the conceptual resources necessary for bringing matters of responsibility into focus or for following so unorthodox a line of reasoning. Hence, the very idea of epistemic responsibility unsettles the self-certainty of an orthodoxy for which knowers are replicable space-holders, whose circumstances—broadly or narrowly conceived—are irrelevant to evaluative processes of verification or falsification.

Nonetheless, working within a conceptual frame for which responsible or irresponsible epistemic practices—of knowing, and *a fortiori* of responsible knowing *as* conduct—can move toward closing a conceptual-interpretive lacuna that holds a range of issues *hors de question* in epistemology and its cognate practices, even as the politics of knowledge claims increased epistemic

legitimacy. Pivotal are matters of epistemic subjectivity that are vital to analyses of responsibility, but could claim no place in Anglo-American epistemology, then. Yet these matters are integral to issues, practices, and puzzles that exceed the assertive scope and legitimacy of “*S* knows that *p*” declarations. They direct attention to the activity—the human *praxis* of knowing, inquiring, deliberating—in an ongoing quest that resists premature closure.

Questions about responsible epistemic conduct have often met with impatience or disdain from mainstream Anglo-American epistemologists, no doubt because it is difficult to establish definitive criteria for or against judging how well an act/process/practice of knowing fulfills or evades these requirements. Moreover, elaborated occasions of epistemic (mis)conduct often risk committing the *ad hominem* fallacy, even though such acts are not so different from the practices of judging *moral* conduct good or bad which are integral to virtue ethics. Apart from strict adherence to a utilitarian calculus or facsimile thereof, ethical/moral conduct is amenable to interpretive-evaluative judgements, which admit of degree. The parallel is plausible. Yet, given the tenacity of logical positivism and its derivatives, Anglo-American epistemologists have been less than prepared to think analogously about knowing. Silently, knowing tends to be conceived as an all-or-nothing phenomenon, which in striving for objectivity, presupposes and preserves the anonymity or the absence of the knowing subject(s).

Although the knower is generally absent from articulated knowledge claims beyond appearing as a place-holder in relatively trivial, empirically derived assertions, epistemology prior to *social* epistemology persisted, for Anglo-American philosophers, as a more rigorously individualist activity/practice than moral-political practices could be. When paradigmatic knowledge claims draw on standard events and equipment, in (presumptively) materially replete scenarios with a single but replicable player, the act of knowing that a cup is on the table needs no additional substance to establish it and to accord it exemplary status. Yet this status is itself an artefact of the localized specificity and limited reach

of the putative universality of standard epistemic exemplars, and of the invisibility of knowers beyond their role as mere place-holders. To invoke a tired yet still pertinent example, even so venerated an empiricist as Bertrand Russell withdrew the paradigm status he presupposed for “All swans are white” in the aftermath of colonizers’ “discovering” black swans in Australia. The example points to the limitations of generalizing from local experiences and to the challenges colonialism, at home and abroad, poses to taken-for-granted epistemic habits and practices. Are such practices thereby rendered irresponsible? The question is unsettling for Anglo-centered evaluations of responsibility in “mainstream” epistemology: clearly, their paradigm status, not just as specific utterances, but as constitutive of settled epistemic practices and precepts, needs to be reevaluated, and its putative “universality” reconsidered.

A plausible explanation for the difficulties in bringing matters of epistemic conduct into the then-going (late 1980s) conceptual frame that set the standards for evaluating epistemic practices as “responsible” or otherwise derives from the conception of subjectivity that silently sustained the “instituted” epistemic imaginary in “mainstream” Anglo-American epistemology. Then, and often still now, “S” was an infinitely replicable place-holder: the invisible knower “. . . that *p*.” When the influence of British empiricism and logical positivism was strongest, S was rarely named, yet *he* was presumptively adult (but not old), male, white, educated, and sufficiently affluent to have cups, tables, and other “standard” material accoutrements of “everyday life” in the social-economic circumstances that formed the presumed backdrop of *his* being, knowing and doing. Moreover, exemplary empirical knowledge claims were commonly uttered “outwards,” into an empty or universally presupposed space: hence neither deliberately nor interactively. The discursive spaces (written or spoken) into which knowledge claims are spoken, heard, written, or read were rarely considered relevant to evaluation. Such assumptions infused the social-epistemic *imaginary* of Anglo-American philosophy then—

and still, if less persistently, now. Silently yet firmly, they establish the scope and limits of human knowledge worthy of the name, and of epistemological investigation.

Reasons for or against the uptake of such projects are difficult to substantiate, but a sense of the opposition they generated, is evident in two early reviews of *Epistemic Responsibility*: by Elizabeth Fricker¹⁰ and Susan Haack.¹¹ The former is cautiously yet helpfully critical; the latter vociferously excoriating. For Fricker (and I agree), a serious flaw is the book's (=the author's) failure to spell out exactly what a 'responsibilist' epistemology is. She notes its indebtedness to Aristotelian virtue theory, is uneasy about its appeal to a Kantian idea of the active role of the subject in synthesizing experience, and suggests that the epistemic responsibilities an agent is to fulfill are insufficiently articulated in the text. These points are well taken. They suggest that a principal flaw derives from my attempt to position the book in relation to analytic epistemology then, some of whose major contributors I cite. With respect to Haack's review, evidently the hermeneutic style of much of the book's presentation—its quasi-narrative articulation—offends her: plainly, she is deeply offended. She elaborates her reaction in extensive examples of places where I am less than exact; where the writing is allusive rather than expository-argumentative, where I fail to observe settled distinctions. Many such criticisms might be warranted, yet the review's mockingly dismissive tone is at best grossly insulting, at worst, nastily mocking. Its purpose is unclear: seemingly, it means to discipline an undisciplined—and ignorant—would-be philosopher. In so doing, it speaks from a closed, hard-edged epistemic stance where the epistemic "engagement" these criticisms suggest is characteristic of what Kristi Dotson calls a "culture of justification." The con-

¹⁰Elizabeth Fricker, Review of *Epistemic Responsibility* by Lorraine Code and *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality* by Richard Foley. *Mind* vol. 98, No. 391, July 1989. 457–461.

¹¹Susan Haack, Review of *Epistemic Responsibility* by Lorraine Code. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* vol. 21, No. 1, March 1991. 91–107.

trast is with a deliberative, dialogical culture, as I understand it. Whereas the justificatory approach has no space for reading philosophers as engaged in ongoing dialogic inquiry, in a culture of praxis where the aim is to work collegially, collaboratively—if not harmoniously—toward evaluating, understanding, interpreting guiding beliefs, be they superficial or sedimented.¹² Epistemic friction may well be integral to the process, but it need not be negatively or aggressively conceived.

As *Epistemic Responsibility* moves into a more explicitly *hermeneutic* dimension, there is a clearer sense of what is at stake, as also in its appeals to quasi-Wittgensteinian cautions about asking not for meaning, but for use: in its *situating* knowledge.¹³ That said, I do not spell out necessary and sufficient conditions for achieving responsibility in epistemic practice, mainly because there are none. Nor do I offer a guide or rule-book. This absence, for some (including Haack), may leave the book in something of a criterion-less limbo. Yet, such an approach is not so different from a putative *doer's* endeavors to engage in virtuous moral-political conduct. Although there may be no established rules, epistemic agents learn, communally and interactively, to work toward achieving responsible epistemic practices: to navigate situations where trust, deliberation and debate are their principal resources, and accountability is difficult to evaluate.¹⁴ Would-be knowers need be neither dogmatic nor rigidly rule-bound in so doing: often, and appropriately, there *are* no rules and arguments may work from example and/or analogy. Nonetheless, thinking how knowers might achieve such a goal is an ongoing project in

¹²Kristi Dotson, "How is this Paper Philosophy?" *Comparative Philosophy* v3, n1, 2012 (with thanks to Gaile Pohlhaus). See also Janice Moulton, "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method." In Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983.

¹³The reference is to Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges." In her *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

¹⁴See Heather Battaly, "Intellectual Virtues." In Stan van Hooft, ed., *The Handbook of Intellectual Virtues*. Durham, UK. Acumen Publishing, 2014, 177–187.

social epistemology, as is evaluating epistemic responsibility in its fundamental connections with trust. The conclusion may be that analytic epistemology, owing to the fixity of its formal conceptual apparatus, cannot make space for epistemic responsibility, and is impoverished in consequence. Such a conclusion is not mine.

When Fricker's and Haack's reviews appeared, the conceptual resources may well have been lacking for assessing the meaning and value of responsible epistemic conduct. Hence, it would be challenging—akin to a category mistake—to spell out rules or necessary and sufficient conditions for its achievement. Yet Fricker's puzzlement is apt. There was no conceptual space where knowers could find “the minds prepared” to take its potential seriously (recalling Louis Pasteur: *Dans les champs de l'observation le hasard ne favorise que les esprits préparés*: chance, or fortune, favors only the prepared mind). Now, social epistemology is creating spaces where such projects can claim a voice:¹⁵ spaces hospitable to understanding knowledge-seeking as a *social practice* in communicative-interpretive frameworks where discussion, deliberation, debate claim a pivotal place just as significant as isolated, individual ‘S knows that *p*’ claims, uttered as into a void, had done. Conditions of situation and uptake, thus, claim a new centrality; knowledge-seeking projects, and hermeneutic-interpretive-deliberative practices a renewed pertinence, even though the subjectivity of the subject remains unaddressed. Elizabeth Fricker, with many Anglo-American epistemologists then, found a quasi-oxymoronic uneasiness in the very idea that so putatively inexact a practice could claim the label “epistemology” while offering no objective (as contrasted with situation-specific) criteria that, for bona fide epistemologists, are definitive of epistemic practice. Yet ‘responsibilists’ need not eschew such criteria: respect for empirical evidence, commitment to truth seeking and objectivity, adherence to public standards of inquiry remain. Still,

¹⁵I refer to Edward Craig's innovative approach, moving away from representing single epistemic agents speaking into a void, to working with the language of speakers and hearers: a revolutionary move whose implications are central to the development of social epistemology. See his *Knowledge and the State of Nature*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

responsible epistemic conduct requires practices that are even more challenging: communicative, deliberative, evaluative, temporally extended practices such as are rarely engaged by knowers as isolated, solitary place-holders producing punctiform knowledge claims.

Social epistemology involves more than adding a concept or a variation to an established conceptual orthodoxy. It marks a radical shift in practices of understanding and evaluating knowledge as integral to, and constitutive of ways of being in the world. Like all human practices, knowing is situated within and enabled or thwarted by material, political, geographical, situational, cultural, and numerous other factors, many of which evoke matters of responsibility. Feminist, antiracist, multicultural and other “difference sensitive” theories and practices are acutely sensitive to such issues. By this feature alone, in its multiple modalities, they depart from the bland neutrality of Anglo-American orthodoxy. Nor do all such factors figure in every instance of social epistemology *per se*, so to speak, but their insistent (if tacit) affirmation unsettles the scope and limits of pre-social epistemic projects.

Situating this discussion within and with reference to an *epistemic imaginary*,¹⁶ is more than and different from adding one more piece to an established conceptual apparatus. As I have indicated, in advocating such an epistemic relocation, I am drawing indirectly and variously on the work of Michèle Le Dœuff and Cornelius Castoriadis. While neither of these thinkers makes explicit reference to epistemic responsibility, their (diverse) conceptions of an *imaginary* gesture toward developing an explanatory framework for loosening the constraints inherent in framing the inquiry within rhetorical spaces where the power of such a conceptual reconstruction is unacknowledged. Hence, I endorse Le Dœuff’s contention that “there is no intellectual activity that is not grounded in an imaginary,”¹⁷ while affirming that work-

¹⁶Charles Taylor writes about imaginaries in a sense contiguous with, but not identical to the sense that informs the works I draw upon here. See his *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Duke University Press, 2003.

¹⁷Michèle Le Dœuff, *The Sex of Knowing*, trans. Kathryn Hamer & Lorraine Code. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. xvi.

ing within an *imaginary* is emphatically not to be confused with appeals to “imagination” as fantasy—individual or collective—as an explanatory contributor to knowledge making and circulating. Such thought experiments have no place here. Yet neither is the point to discount the contributions of “imagination” to knowledge production: as José Medina shows, the language of a social “imagination,” also, claims space in these deliberations, albeit differently.¹⁸

In understanding inquiry as grounded in an imaginary, I am following Castoriadis in referring to a widespread, if often imperceptible yet multifaceted world-view or framework; a complex of ideas, expectations, presuppositions, implicit assumptions which are by no means beyond articulation or debate, even though they rarely enter everyday discourse. An imaginary thus conceived is distantly analogous to a Kuhnian paradigm or a Foucauldian *episteme* in shaping, framing, conferring legitimacy and/or its opposite, on quotidian knowing in its particularity and generality. With Kuhn, paradigms refer to standard-setting exemplars of scientific legitimacy within a powerful if often tacit world view, which confer or withhold judgements of specific scientific achievement. With Castoriadis, Le Dœuff, and Foucault (albeit variously for each) the effects of an imaginary can be more quotidian than domain specific. Thus for example, as the rhetoric of “public man, private woman” signals, it has been integral to a western-northern white middle-class social imaginary that women (of a certain class, age, race) should comport themselves “decorously” in ways which, among other effects, were stifling, inhibiting, damaging; that certain areas of activity, study, or employment were “unsuitable” for a woman. Likewise, received values—epistemic, social, moral, political, ontological—deeply if silently embedded in, yet constitutive of, the dailiness (the *allgemeine Alltäglichkeit*) of “everyday life” carry a normative force whose (often silent) power demands recognition in thought and action. Violations occasion disapproval or worse, yet their manifestations are less than explicit, despite

¹⁸José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

the power they exert. The social imaginary characteristic of white middle-class North America, as of much of the affluent western-northern world in the twentieth- and twenty-first century, has silently condoned and perpetuated such coercive practices, shaping the assumptions that hold “neutral” examples in place, whose “neutrality” has often masked an endorsement of variably unjust yet entrenched ways of thinking, being, and knowing. Nor were/are these assumptions always negative, restrictive. In their evolving modalities, they open space for hitherto unacceptable policies and practices: women’s and non-white people’s admission to higher education in many countries is one telling example. Analogous claims pertain, diversely, to assumptions that hold approval or disapproval in place across the social-political-everyday world in most societies and situations: albeit gradually and tacitly, they are sufficiently powerful to effect hitherto unimaginable shifts in social practices.

Writing *Epistemic Responsibility* in the early 1980s, I knew neither Le Dœuff’s nor Castoriadis’s work: their rich—diverse—thinking about *the imaginary*. In consequence, my analysis was too slender in its articulation of the conceptions of subjectivity and epistemic agency that informed it; and of the powerful, if often hidden, forces that conferred or withheld attributions of responsibility. Processes of understanding thinking, knowing, living within an imaginary relocate this way of thinking, now, (if less clearly then) off-side from an epistemological orthodoxy with its presuppositions that formal analyses couched in a language of anonymity (*S* knows that *p*) or generic assertions about knowers and the known, will best achieve a sought-for objectivity and explanatory clarity if they remain uncluttered by the specificities of subjects and situations: by *particularities*. With such presuppositions, this analysis parts company. One reason for this shift derives from the exclusionary power, then (if less starkly now) of a divide between Anglo-American and so-called “Continental” philosophical thinking about knowledge. It manifests vividly in a widespread (erst-while) Anglo-American philosophical reluctance to acknowledge and draw upon the *interpretive-hermeneutical* resources integral to the practice of such philosophers as Martin Heidegger, Simone

de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Luce Irigaray, Franz Fanon, and their “post-modern” contemporaries and descendants.¹⁹ Most of these philosophers neither represent themselves nor are they represented as epistemologists (owing perhaps to a resistance to Anglo-American orthodoxy, or to convictions about the interrelatedness of diverse “branches” of philosophy). Their engagements with “being in the world” investigate ways of experiencing and knowing that world in its singularities, sociality, multiplicity and unevenly distributed power structures. They work, albeit variously, with practices of explicitly embodied knowing that are responsive and responsible, or the reverse, in their interactive relations with their “subject matters.”²⁰ From such holistic approaches, *the imaginary* achieves its power as a resource, where epistemological questions may well not be labelled as such, but they are woven into larger interpretive/hermeneutical analyses. Knowing, being, doing appear as integrated *practices*: “situated knowledges” in Donna Haraway’s words attest to analogous assumptions and practices, although the terminology would not be hers.

Thinking-knowing within an epistemic imaginary in its contrasts with an imaginary of mastery and control; eschewing any goal of achieving a “view from nowhere,” are integral to Castoriadis’s conception of an *instituted social imaginary*. It “carries within it the normative social meanings, customs, expectations, assumptions, values, prohibitions, and permissions—the habitus and ethos—into which human beings are nurtured from childhood and which they internalize, affirm, challenge, or contest as they make sense of their place, responsibilities, options within a world, both social and physical whose “nature” and meaning

¹⁹A notable exception is Linda Martín Alcoff, *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* (Cornell: 1996) which draws extensively and admirably on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Michel Foucault and, of particular relevance to my thinking here, on hermeneutics.

²⁰Pertinent is Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press, 2007. Rather than “interactive” Barad says “intra-active.”

are also instituted within these imaginary significations.”²¹ This conceptual framing owes a significant debt to phenomenology, especially in its hermeneutic modalities, while simultaneously drawing on and engaging with approaches in Anglo-American epistemology that are, perhaps in spite of themselves, hospitable to such readings. The consequent position need be neither static nor dogmatic. To it Castoriadis counter-poses the *instituting* imaginary: the critical-creative activity of a society whose autonomy is apparent in its capacity to put itself in question; recognizing that as a society, it is incongruous with itself, with scant reason for self-satisfaction.²² Feminist, post-colonial, anti-racist and other “new” epistemologies are often informed by what amounts to an implicit recognition of such incongruities.

Relating these thoughts to epistemic responsibility, I suggest that working toward its realization—cognizant of its questions as both urgent and difficult—requires no mere adjustment of certain basic assumptions of mainstream epistemology: it re-situates its projects and practices. Thus to Medina’s question: “When is partaking in a body of social ignorance a form of irresponsibility? . . . And is the failure in responsibility an ethical failure of the individual or a political failure of society?”²³—my response is that, despite its seeming to fall outside the purview of standard epistemology *tout court*, the failure is both ethical and political. Thus, appeals to epistemic responsibility, which has been something of a sleeper since my 1987 book appeared,²⁴ are now enriching the conceptual repertoire of Anglo-American social epistemology; opening new rhetorical-discursive spaces. In consequence, epistemic inquiry moves toward wide-ranging *reconceptions* of the place and purpose of responsibility in knowledge-making and knowledge-conveying practices. One of its most significant effects is in the spaces it

²¹Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. New York: Oxford, 2006, esp. pps 29ff.

²²See Castoriadis (1998) and Castoriadis (1994).

²³José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. New York: Oxford, 2013, p. 133.

²⁴Lorraine Code, *Epistemic Responsibility*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987.

opens for taking subjectivity seriously into account in projects of evaluating knowledge claims, both punctiform and extenuated. Indeed, for this project to succeed, a fundamental restructuring of going assumptions about epistemic subjectivities is urgently required. Such appeals acquire an enhanced urgency in relation to *knowing*—and understanding—the epistemic implications of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and multiple other “otherings” from an entrenched, and powerful social norm.

As its early critics note, epistemic responsibility does not come complete with a set of accompanying rules for the direction of the mind. Like many virtues, it names a precept, a principle whose effects are diffuse, unpredictable, and open to ongoing, collaborative-contestatory deliberation. Often they do not speak for themselves but require collective processes of evaluation/negotiation. I do not spell out necessary and sufficient conditions for achieving epistemic responsibility, and for very good reasons: there are none. But guidelines can be sketched, impressionistic though they may be. In this respect, they are closely akin to other articulations of virtue theory, as for example, in *After Virtue*, where Alasdair MacIntyre affirms the importance of narrative for understanding human lives, emphasizing that virtue is not a one-off phenomenon: it manifests rather as part of “a concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life and death as narrative beginning to middle to end.”²⁵ His claim is not that narrative is the only route to understanding, nor that narratives need to tell of a single, unambiguous isolated protagonist, but that their contribution to engaging with complex moral (and epistemological) questions can be vital.²⁶

For reasons such as these, it is increasingly clear why such socially grounded and enacted capacities as “knowing responsibly” found no easy uptake in Anglo-American philosophy, prior to the development of social epistemology. Now, more than thirty

²⁵Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth, 1981, p. 191.

²⁶Lorraine Code “An Ecology of Epistemic Authority.” *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology*. Special Issue “Social Cognitive Ecology and its Role in Social Epistemology” 8:1, 2011, 25–37.

years after *After Virtue*, and in consequence of the proliferation of social media as sources of information, characteristic of the early twenty-first century, the issues are still more complex. So, for example, in response to my asking what he expected his students to know about the urgency of climate-ecological issues, a colleague responded: “Virtually nothing: their main source of information is Fox News.”²⁷ Does these students’ putative ignorance in these matters invite condemnation, understanding, tolerance? Such questions are increasingly urgent as people’s reliance on social media as sources of knowledge/information increases in western/northern societies, and epistemological counter-arguments often struggle to claim a hearing. Here matters of epistemic responsibility claim a renewed urgency; yet it remains difficult to determine how they can effectively be addressed. A new epistemology of listening, interpreting, deliberating will need to claim a larger place than it has hitherto occupied, in philosophy and in the world; and the inadequacy of epistemic individualism will be increasingly evident.

Still pertinent, then, is Medina’s observation: “The mistake of intellectualism is to think that by changing the epistemic, the ethical and political will follow, whereas . . . people’s concepts and cognitions may not control all their emotions, moral characters, and political attitudes.”²⁸ The going social imaginary makes space for such a thought. Medina, citing Miranda Fricker on epistemic injustice, rightly insists, “such a contextual approach has to be pluralized and rendered relational in more complex ways. . . . [its] assumptions . . . about the pervasiveness of hermeneutical lacunas and their influence on entire collectivities have to be interrogated.” But *whose* collective understanding is at issue? *Whose* collective hermeneutical resource? Of particular interest, especially in relation to climate change, is in how certain “epistemic identities” and social-structural positionings enable and restrict projects of bringing *epistemic responsibility* into

²⁷I cite this example in Lorraine Code, “Culpable Ignorance?” *Hypatia* 39:3 670–676.

²⁸Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*. 2013, p. 90.

conversation with questions about hermeneutic and testimonial (in)justice.

In his chapter “Epistemic Responsibility and Culpable Ignorance,” José Medina asks: “When is partaking in a body of social ignorance a form of irresponsibility? . . . And is the failure in responsibility an ethical failure of the individual or a political failure of society?”²⁹ The questions are timely now that appeals to epistemic responsibility, which has been something of a sleeper since my book appeared in 1987, are currently unsettling—and enriching—the conceptual repertoire of Anglo-American social epistemology: opening new rhetorical-discursive spaces. Medina’s book exemplifies this reengagement. Such appeals acquire an enhanced urgency in relation to climate change skepticism, with the doubts that feed it and are nurtured to preserve it. Participating in such skeptically generated social ignorance is indeed, and always, a form of irresponsibility: at once an ethical and a political failure, with ethics and politics reinforcing one another. It is, primarily, an egregious failure of epistemic responsibility, with cultivated-manufactured ignorance and doubt sustaining the ethics and politics that require contestation.³⁰ The question *whose* irresponsibility is at issue, and how it could/should be discerned and addressed, is complex and fraught in a time of conflicting information, which few “ordinary people” are equipped to disentangle from the vested interests and unstable expertise that often infuse it. Answering the question in the affirmative presupposes that ignorance is recognizable, and that its “partakers” acknowledge it as such. How could they justify doing so?

I have noted Castoriadis’s references to the social unrest that follows when a society where a certain imaginary has prevailed comes to realize that it is *incongruous with itself*: that it is ethically and politically unworthy to struggle to preserve an impoverished imaginary. Especially pertinent in this regard are ongoing, often

²⁹Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*. 2013, p. 133.

³⁰Lorraine Code, “‘Manufactured Uncertainty’: Epistemologies of Mastery and the Ecological Imaginary.” In Peg Rawes, ed., *Relational Architectural Ecologies: Architecture, Nature and Subjectivity*. London: Routledge, 2013.

vicious debates in/about the epistemology and ethics of climate change inquiry. Large epistemic injustices are widely enacted against bringing to public-social attention matters that challenge fixed self-presentations and overinflate an epistemic exaggeration that positions certain findings “*dans le faux*” (to distort the Foucaultian idea “*dans le vrai*”). This inquiry, then, is involved in working to discern how certain “epistemic identities” and social-structural positionings simultaneously enable and restrict projects of bringing *epistemic responsibility* into conversation with matters of hermeneutic and testimonial (in)justice. Difficult to articulate in this regard are injustices performed against hard-won public reasons that generate a certain credibility in favour of scientific research stereotypically presumed to be “neutral” (in a now superseded imaginary!). They unsettle fixed assumptions that accord quasi-inviolable standing to “science has proved” assertions, without asking “whose science?” (with a nod to Sandra Harding). Hence, an instituted imaginary of complacency and comfort seeks reassurance from its own persistence, so long as practitioners look away from empirical events that, increasingly, strike at the core of their lives—and their theories. Taking some of these ideas as my starting point, I am currently examining events of denial and refusal in response to climate change, which the social imaginary of the affluent western world still strives to accommodate.³¹ At issue, still, are questions of individual and collective epistemic responsibility.

³¹Lorraine Code, “Doubt and denial: epistemic responsibility meets climate change scepticism.” In Anna Gear and Evadne Grant, eds., *Thought, Law, Rights and Action in the Age of Environmental Crisis*. UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015.

PREFACE

This book has grown out of a sense that something important is missing from philosophical discussions of “the problem of knowledge.” Epistemologists, in their analyses of the meaning and justification of knowledge claims, rarely ask, “But whose claims? when? and in what circumstances?” Disquiet over the absence of such questions reflects a belief that the answers to them might, somehow, make a difference to epistemological investigation. It is a disquiet that is explained, in part, by Wittgenstein’s observation, in *Zettel*:

Disquiet in philosophy might be said to arise from looking at philosophy wrongly, seeing it wrong, namely as if it were divided into (infinite) longitudinal strips instead of into (finite) cross strips. . . . So we try as it were to grasp the unlimited strips and complain that it cannot be done piecemeal. To be sure it cannot, if by a piece one means an infinite longitudinal strip. But it may well be done if one means a cross-strip.—But in that case we never get to the end of our work!—Of course not, for it has no end.¹

I see this contribution to epistemological discussion as one such cross-strip. My purpose is to show how questions about the epistemic responsibilities of knowers, both as individuals and as members of communities, run cross-wise through many of the (longitudinal) problems that theorists of knowledge have traditionally been concerned to address. It is a tentative and preliminary approach to a task that clearly has no end.

¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), § 447.

Although the position I develop in the book reflects a disaffection, then, with standard approaches to epistemology, my intention is constructive rather than critical. I attempt to develop an alternative way of approaching epistemological questions through shifting the emphasis of the investigation and evaluation of cognitive claims. My central contention is that the knower, or would-be knower, bears as much of the onus of credibility as does the known. I try to demonstrate the plausibility of this contention by deriving an explanatory, descriptive account of knowledge from a study of aspects of human cognitive practice.

Most of the work on the first draft of this book was done during the two-year period from July 1981 to June 1983, when I held a post-doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am grateful to the council for this support. I spent the first of those years, 1981–1982, as a visiting scholar in Oxford, and I would like to thank Dr. J. D. Murray of Corpus Christi College for arranging affiliation with that college and with the Philosophy Sub-Faculty. In 1982–1983 I continued work on the project in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Waterloo. I am grateful to Dr. Rolf George for extending the department's hospitality to me, and to Dr. George (and subsequently to Dr. Brian Hendley) for providing me with continued access to computer facilities after the award had expired. Without the assistance of Grace Logan of the Faculty of Arts Computing Office, I would not have been able to make as good use of those facilities as I did.

Earlier versions of three chapters have appeared in print elsewhere. A somewhat different version of chapter 2 appears under the title "*Father and Son: A Case Study in Epistemic Responsibility*" in *The Monist*, Vol. 66, No. 2, April 1983; a shorter version of chapter 3, "Toward a 'Responsibilist' Epistemology," appears under the same title in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 45, No. 1, September 1984; and an earlier version of chapter 5, "The Knowing Subject," appears under the same title in *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, May 1984.

I am grateful to Alan Montefiore, Douglas Odegard, and Bill Abbott for reading part or all of this work in manuscript and for their helpful comments. For encouragement at times when it was

most needed, I should like to thank Kris Colwell, Joan Gibson, Susan Sherwin, and Richmond Campbell. In addition, I have benefited greatly from the comments of several anonymous readers.

Two readers deserve special mention, for without them this book could not have been written. Without Genevieve Lloyd's detailed and perceptive comments on every chapter, I would never have managed to see where I was going. And without Murray Code's belief in the project from the time of its inception, his time-consuming perusal of every draft, and his emotional support, I would not have reached this (interim) destination. None of these people, of course, can be held responsible for the mistakes I have made on the way.

Guelph, Ontario
December 1986

L.C.

EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Epistemic Responsibility

If a North American motorist rents a car in Britain and proceeds to drive on the right-hand side of the road, thereby causing an accident, the courts will not accept as an excuse that he or she did not know that one drives on the left in Britain. One who takes the wheel of a car has a responsibility to know the rules of the road. So it is with civil and criminal law in general: ignorance does not exonerate in instances of violation. A householder who throws rubbish over the fence onto the neighbor's roses cannot acceptably plead ignorance of the laws pertaining to another's property; nor is a landowner who sprays trees with a noxious chemical exempted from responsibility for any attendant, wider environmental damage simply because of avowed ignorance about the possible effects of insecticide. People engaging in such activities are expected to have a reasonable degree of knowledge about their consequences and implications.

Analogous examples can be suggested from a broader political context. Although many Germans claim not to have known what was happening in Nazi concentration camps, and thus argue that they cannot reasonably be held accountable, others believe they should have made an effort, that in not knowing, they were derelict in what can plausibly be declared a responsibility. Similarly, when a new contraceptive drug is declared safe on the

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basis of broad latitudinal testing but inadequate longitudinal studies, protesters can reasonably declare that no drug so tested can responsibly be pronounced safe. Such a pronouncement would not be so different from the claims of nuclear scientists to people living near test sites that there was nothing to fear. Without first carrying out adequate investigations to produce knowledge, it is irresponsible to make such declarations. So, too, South African upholders of apartheid, who claim to know that blacks prefer to live in "their own" communities for they are not at ease in white society, may well be uttering propaganda statements based on inadequate investigations of the preferences of blacks.

Similar considerations arise in the personal domain. In a friendship, one is expected to know what counts as a confidence and what is information for public consumption. A breach of trust will not readily be repaired even though the one who broke the confidence was not actually told that the item in question was confidential. This is but one instance of the kinds of things one needs to know about other people to conduct personal relationships well. Such relationships generate a complex set of responsibilities that can be fulfilled only by cultivating an appropriate sensitivity to the other person's situation.

In these examples, I adduce a set of claims about expectations and responsibilities. In each case, a responsibility *to know* is at issue, and it is to that responsibility that I wish to draw attention. It is true that, in many of the cases, it is the action(s) based upon the inadequate or carelessly arrived at knowledge claims or beliefs that come under public scrutiny and that seem to invite moral and/or legal censure, for the consequences of being wrong are serious. But it is instructive, for *epistemological* purposes, to focus upon the assumed or alleged knowledge itself, to consider what is involved in the contention that there is, often, a responsibility to know, or at least to know better than one does.

The points I have raised in these examples about our responsibility to know are neither new nor startling. They articulate familiar, if often implicit, aspects of our experiences about the place and status of knowledge as the basis for action in everyday life. I shall propose, though, that examples taken from commonplace occurrences in ordinary cognitive activity are significant

for theory of knowledge. In fact, I shall outline an approach to theory of knowledge that turns questions about, and conditions for, *epistemic responsibility* into focal points of explication and analysis. Central to this approach will be the view that knowing well is a matter of considerable moral significance; hence, moral issues and questions of “character” are often integral aspects of epistemic evaluation. I shall maintain that one is frequently in a better position to understand how, or what, a person knows, and to understand the implications of that presumed knowledge, when it can be placed in the context of the putative knower’s character. Concentration upon questions of this nature—upon questions about the moral implications of knowledge claims and about the character of would-be knowers—will yield a new perspective on the knowledge-seeking enterprise.

Looking at cognitive activity from this perspective raises a different set of questions about knowledge from those posed in the two leading approaches to theory of knowledge: in foundationalist and coherentist theories. These new questions are not posed to challenge coherentist or foundationalist ways of thinking, however. Indeed, to an extent, they are suggested by certain coherentist and/or foundationalist insights.

The central concern of foundationalist epistemology is perhaps best captured in the question with which Bertrand Russell opens *The Problems of Philosophy*:¹ “Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it?” Foundationalists share the belief that Russell’s question can be answered in the affirmative, that knowledge claims discovered to be “so certain” can stand as the basis—the foundation—of a system of knowledge. They hold that a body of knowledge is composed of separate (or separable) “pieces” or “parts” and that a nonsymmetrical relation, analogous to the relation of physical support, holds between the foundations and the rest of the system. Foundations are understood to be a special, primary part or set of parts; therefore, they bear a relation to all the other parts of the system, which none of these parts bear, reciprocally, to the

¹ Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 1.

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foundation. Just as the base of a pyramid supports the rest of the structure yet the higher levels do not support the base, so foundations support a system of knowledge.² Some foundationalists, of whom Descartes is the outstanding example, assume that knowledge claims arrived at by deductive reasoning from a “clear and distinct” starting point will themselves be just as clear and distinct. Their clarity and distinctness derives from the clarity and distinctness of that starting point. Others, in particular some of the logical positivists as well as empiricists such as Russell himself, Moore, and Ayer, hold that the degree of certainty in knowledge claims diminishes as one moves away from the core, or foundational, propositions.

Although these common, central foundationalist concerns can be identified, it is not possible to go on to elaborate a single, monolithic foundationalist doctrine, for foundationalist theories differ from one another, particularly with respect to the degree of certainty they require of foundations. According to the strictest of such theories, foundations, to qualify as such, must be absolutely, timelessly certain. According to modest foundationalism, however, foundations should be only as certain as possible; indeed, they may even be corrigible, though not of all the foundational propositions of a system could be declared uncertain and in need of amendment at the same time. As the contrast between Descartes, on the one hand, and Moore, Russell, and Ayer, on the other, shows, foundationalism cannot be straightforwardly aligned either with rationalism or with empiricism.

For coherentist epistemology, the source of evaluation and justification of a belief or knowledge claim lies in its relations with other beliefs or “knowns” within a system; explanatory relations or relations of probability or logic might be taken into account. To be considered justified, a belief must fit, without causing contradictions or other problems of inconsistency, into an interlock-

²I owe this brief account of foundationalism, together with the image of the pyramid and some of the discussion of coherentism which follows, to Ernest Sosa's account in his article, “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* V, eds. P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, Jr., and H. K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980). It will become apparent from the following chapters that Sosa's work has had an important influence on my thinking.

ing system of mutually compatible truths. No belief is more fundamental than any other within the system. Classical instances of coherence theory are found in the great rationalist metaphysical systems, such as those of Leibniz and Spinoza, and in German and British idealism. Some coherentists, such as Neurath and Hempel, see the systems of pure mathematics and theoretical physics as paradigmatic for showing how the coherence relation works: all the statements of these systems are related to one another by relations of logical implication. Indeed, purists might argue that a coherence theory can justify only such analytic or a priori claims, that to move away from the paradigm of mathematics or physics and apply coherence criteria to a posteriori knowledge is, in fact, to work with an entirely different theory. Others argue, and plausibly I think, that coherence within a theoretical system is just as important a criterion for assessing knowledge claims within the empirical sciences as is the degree to which those claims are grounded in experience. Indeed, in fields of enquiry such as history, coherence is of crucial importance, for the possibility of checking knowledge claims against real events is remote, if not nonexistent. In such disciplines, though, one does not deal exclusively with criteria of coherence: at some points, the system must establish contact with the "real" world.

There is a wide spectrum of positions, all of which can reasonably be designated coherentist, within modern epistemology. Some recent work, less tied to the deductive model than the work of Neurath and Hempel, emphasizes the significance of explanatory coherence. The goal of enquiry might be described, in Gilbert Harman's words, as that of arriving, by a process of inductive inference, at "the best total explanatory account."³ By contrast, Keith Lehrer gives considerable weight to what one might call "subjective coherence": the need for a reciprocal adjustment between the coherent system of knowledge and/or beliefs a person employs in moving about the world (what he calls a person's "acceptance system") and a putatively "new" knowledge

³cf. Gilbert Harman, *Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 158ff.

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claim, which is in the process of becoming part of the system.⁴ A new claim is acceptable and a knower reasonable in accepting it only to the extent that it fits with the system of what is already known. And Lawrence Bonjour, who explicitly ties his coherentist position to a realist metaphysics, argues that there simply is no good reason to believe that one objective world would, in the long run, provide “coherent input to incompatible systems.”⁵ Coherence, presumably, will manifest itself in an ultimate synthesis of compatible knowledge claims.

Questions about epistemic responsibility take some of their thrust from what are best called the “empirico-realist” implications of some versions of foundationalism. There is a realist imperative at the center of all the exhortations to responsibility I have cited in my opening examples: an insistence that responsible knowledge claims can arise only out of investigations, in part empirical and inductive, that attempt to discover how things really are, both actually and potentially. To this extent, questions about epistemic responsibility arise out of sympathy with some conceptions of the foundationalist project: the goal is to ensure that knowledge claims are well-grounded in the world, that they respect the constraints the world imposes upon those who would know it.

Responsible knowers are uneasy about possible inconsistency and incoherence within their own system of knowledge and within “public” systems of knowledge that they are tempted to endorse or inclined to reject. Many of the examples cited at the outset require would-be knowers not to turn aside from, or attempt to explain away, aspects of experience that do not fit with what they can reasonably claim to know. Indeed, claims about epistemic responsibility in some of these cases suggest that, if the putative knowers had been appropriately alert to the incoherence of certain claims (say, about the drug or the nuclear test)

⁴See Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974); and especially his “Knowledge, Truth and Ontology,” in *Language and Ontology: Proceedings of the Sixth International Wittgenstein Symposium* (Vienna: Verlag Holder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1982).

⁵Lawrence Bonjour, “The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge,” *Philosophical Studies* 30 (1976): p. 303.

within the wider context of scientific knowledge, even as it is accessible to the lay public, they would not have rested content with thinking they knew.

Having said that, however, it is important to state that this project arises out of a certain disenchantment with foundationalism and coherentism. It is probably true that these approaches, separately or jointly, represent the best efforts of epistemology so far to approach “the problem of knowledge.” They can neither reasonably be rejected outright, nor can they be set aside as having completed their project. We still really do not know what it is (that is, *understand* what it is) to know even the simple fact that “This is green.” Nonetheless, part of my disaffection with traditional epistemology has to do with what can only be seen as an aridity, manifested in the amount of discussion devoted to questions just like that one: analyses of how our simple perceptual and inductive beliefs are justified. My intention is neither to minimize the importance of these questions nor to deny that there is much work to be done in these areas. These problems are enormously difficult ones whose solutions would be of paramount significance for the future of epistemological enquiry. Efforts to show and understand the extent to which knowledge can be founded and efforts to construct as coherent a system of knowledge as possible must surely be recognized as fundamentally important to any philosophical enterprise. But enquiry within established foundationalist/coherentist discourse is, by and large, conducted under the assumption that a fairly well-understood range of questions and possible answers demarcates the permissible focus of epistemological debate. The implicit view often seems to be that, if epistemologists could get clear about what justifies our claims that this is a hand and that is a doorknob, then all the rest would follow. In other words, such propositional claims, once explicated, would provide paradigms for the explanation and justification of all knowledge. Yet philosophers are aware, too, that even when these problems have not been solved, other questions about knowledge can be raised and debated fruitfully: questions that form the core of debate in the philosophies of science, social science, or law, to name but a

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few examples. Many of these enquiries are conducted in a context totally lacking such simple paradigms, yet intricate and subtle questions about the nature of knowledge can still be posed.

I am suggesting, then, that it is possible to look at human cognitive activity in another way and to ask quite a different set of questions about it. My point is not so much to claim that traditional epistemology has neglected the issues I shall address but to maintain that there is a choice about what questions are to be considered central in discussions of human knowledge-seeking activity. Only by approaching this activity from a different perspective will it be possible to provide the missing complement to foundationalist and coherentist theories. I shall therefore outline an approach that raises questions and puts forward proposals about what counts as good cognitive activity that slip through even the most carefully constructed foundationalist or coherentist nets. Furthermore, I shall show that this project can be undertaken without waiting for traditional epistemological tasks either to be completed or abandoned.

My emphasis upon cognitive *activity* is intentional and important. The major contrast between the line of approach to be developed here and the predominant tradition is in the way this new position moves away from a concentration upon products, end-states of cognition. It turns, instead, to an examination of process, of efforts to achieve these end-states. It does so from a conviction that concentration upon products restricts the possible results of enquiry in two ways. First, and perhaps implicitly, it construes the cognitive subject as a featureless abstraction, a constantly repeated element in a consistently repeated operation where the cognitive activity of that subject is not itself open to significant epistemological scrutiny. Second, concentration upon end-states grants them an unwarranted finality, making them seem implausibly definitive, static, and removed from the flux of cognitive process. Consequently, the dominant tradition forces the analysis and evaluation of knowledge into unreasonably constricted molds.

My intention is to shift the emphasis of investigation and evaluation so that knowers, or would-be knowers, come to bear as

much of the onus of credibility as “the known” has standardly borne. The discussion will focus upon how everyday, practical, epistemic life provides the context in which knowledge, belief, understanding, *and* epistemological questions themselves can be developed. It will concentrate upon the concerns real knowers have, in complex situations, about being responsible in their cognitive endeavors. I will take as my point of departure the strong claim that experience grounds knowledge; there will be no attempt to arrive at a description of “pure” knowledge that might somehow prescind from or transcend experience.

The conceptual apparatus for such a shift in the focus of enquiry is available, at least in essence, elsewhere in the philosophical tradition. I take the Kantian conception of a creative synthesis of the imagination to be one of the most important innovations in the history of philosophy. It provides a conceptual framework that can account for the active nature of human cognition, taking and structuring experience to the extent allowed by the world and human cognitive capacities. These two factors, the nature of the world and of human cognitive capacity, impose strong constraints upon the form and content knowledge as (interim) product can have. Although neither “the world” nor human cognitive capacities can be assumed to be immutable, they constitute an objective, if shifting, framework within which the creative synthesis must take place. Within these constraints, however, there is considerable scope for freedom in making sense of the world. Any account of knowledge that recognizes this degree of creativity, therefore, must, at the same time, recognize a need for cognitive imperatives to limit what kinds of sense can *responsibly* be made of the world.

It is undeniable that human flourishing is deeply dependent upon knowing well. Human beings seem, for the most part, to be concerned to conduct their epistemic lives well, whether from a conviction that knowledge is valuable in its own right or for prudential, pragmatic, or less morally condonable reasons. Taken together, these normative and empirical considerations suggest that even a contrived thought experiment of the “Suppose there were only one person in the world . . .” variety would have to

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recognize epistemic pressures, giving rise to rudimentary epistemic imperatives. At the most primitive and practical level, these imperatives would arise simply out of a need to know and to assess one's situation as well as possible for the sake of survival. They would be unarticulated, implicit in the situation. A Robinson Crusoe, despite his isolation from society, retains the pressure of such imperatives in a more articulated, socially oriented form. Arguably, such articulation is possible only because he has already been part of society, and knowing about his circumstances beyond what is necessary for simple physical survival has become part of what is involved (epistemically) in keeping his bearings. Clearly, though, even in such situations, one does better, in some specifiable senses, if one knows well.

My intention, then, is to develop a descriptive analysis of some of the central problems and imperatives encountered by people trying to conduct their epistemic lives as well as possible, seeking to know, to understand, and to arrive at well-warranted beliefs. This task is neither a purely fact-finding mission nor a mere exercise in conceptual analysis. Knowing well, being epistemically responsible, have implications for people's individual, social, and political lives. This account, then, is not purely descriptive, if that is thought to imply description without evaluation. The intention is, rather, to show that some varieties of epistemic proceedings are better, more responsible, than others.

Several additional assumptions need to be made clear. I have stated that the fundamental premise of the enquiry is that actual human cognitive practice is the proper and appropriate focus of epistemological investigation. It is thus maintained from the outset that the *Lebenswelt*, the world in which human cognitive agents live and experience and know, is in every way as real as (and indeed in many ways more real for human beings than) the world described, for example, in scientific theory, in terms of elementary particles, or of mathematical formulae. A central tenet of my position is that theorists of knowledge should avoid thinking in terms of an inferior order of "appearance" that contrasts with a more absolute "reality," thereby implying that this "reality" is the only proper object of knowledge. I do not mean that pre-

cisely the same modes of explanation will do for every way of regarding experience, only that the scope of epistemological enquiry must be able to encompass both of these often differentiated realms without privileging either one.

Second, in stating that there is often a responsibility to know better than one does, I am assuming that there are degrees of knowledge, ways of knowing more or less well, that still qualify as knowledge. This point is masked when simple perceptual examples such as "The book is on the shelf" are taken as paradigmatic knowledge claims, for here knowledge is plainly an all-or-nothing affair. Either I know or I do not know that the book is on the shelf; I cannot know it a little bit or to a certain extent. I can, however, know a little bit about the dangers of certain drugs or of nuclear testing; I can know too little, in fact, to make responsible knowledge claims or to act reasonably on the basis of my alleged knowledge.

Third, I am not assuming there are constant, readily discernible distinctions to be made amongst knowledge, belief, and understanding. I shall not always list these as separate (or separable) object(s) of the study; rather, I shall use the terms somewhat loosely and often interchangeably. Reasons why it is not vital to draw tight lines around them, separating one from another, will become clear in the course of the discussion. The emerging picture will be better for this inexactness. My aim is to understand epistemic life as it is, not in a tidied-up, abstracted version.

Fourth, and concomitantly, it is by no means clear that these processes (that is, knowing, believing, and understanding), either singly or together, fall into the dubious category of "states of mind." One might consider them to be "states of persons" or "states of organisms" without, however, endorsing any static implications. They seem to be the products of dispositions or capacities that are amendable to cultivation and control. It is not essential, though, to arrive at a correct way of characterizing these complex (and often overlapping) processes. Indeed, part of the disaffection that gives rise to this book has to do with a persistent thrust in epistemology toward classifying, and hence

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oversimplifying, what is involved in these processes. The insistence upon getting clear about what they are in some essential sense tends, above all, to obscure what makes them most worthy of study: the wonder of them.

A governing belief that creates much of the impetus for my enquiry into these issues bears reiteration: there very probably cannot be a perfect, ideal theory of knowledge that ties things together in a tidy way. To deny this possibility is not, however, to affirm that we must remain forever mystified. The route I propose is indirect and tentative, but it is redeemed by its fertility and its capacity to remain in touch with the need to account for what happens when real human beings try to make sense of their experience. The approach is not invalidated by the fact that, *ex hypothesi*, there is no neutral standpoint from which the enquiry can be conducted, for a theorist's efforts to understand are part of the same knowing process that is often separated out as the object of special scrutiny.

In this "responsibilist" account, as in traditional accounts, I maintain that knowledge claimants must produce good reasons for what they claim to know or understand. Questions about evidence, justification, and validity are persistent epistemological questions; but my approach carries the indispensable caveat that these questions are valid only when they are framed so that they do not constrain replies to those that offer definitive, conclusive evidence or to those that provide final justification. Standard justification procedures, and the questions to which they purportedly respond, retain an important place within this view of cognition, yet they deal with only a small part of a complex situation out of which beliefs and knowledge claims arise and are challenged. Their explanatory capacity is quite limited. Although we do not lack evidence that we know and understand something of the world, or at least that we can derive reliable knowledge from our experience of it, we are a very long way from knowing what it is to know, from understanding what it is to understand, even after centuries of concentration upon such questions.

In the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein observes, "Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is

the hardest thing.”⁶ The observation captures a fundamental aim of this book. By endorsing certain aspects of foundational epistemology, yet not the foundationalist project as such, I have indicated the need to maintain what I call an empirico-realist orientation in knowledge-seeking endeavors. The need to maintain such an orientation is experienced by would-be knowers as a kind of pressure upon them as cognitive agents. This pressure might well not be felt by those empiricists who believe that the world imprints itself willy-nilly upon our cognitive apparatus so that the primary cognitive task is simply to sort and shuffle what is given. It is a pressure one might hope to evade could one appeal, in a foundational way, to sources of epistemic authority and/or to privileged epistemic propositions that could guarantee the validity of cognitive assertions. Having assumed the absence of such authority, either immanent or transcendent, one is faced, it seems, either with allowing that “anything goes” or with insisting that “reality,” however it is construed, must constrain cognitive activity, that one must, perhaps paradoxically, cultivate an openness to that constraint, although such an attitude is indeed hard to achieve. I am arguing (as Wittgenstein, too, maintains) that the latter alternative is the preferred one. Its achievement seems, in fact, to require a well-developed epistemic character, and just what that might involve is the subject of this discussion.

The project, then, is to develop a perspective in theory of knowledge that is neither analogous in structure nor in functional capacity to foundationalist and coherentist theories, but that sees a different set of questions as central to epistemological enquiry. The differences I shall elaborate are, admittedly, matters of degree and emphasis, but they are real differences none the less. By shifting the emphasis of enquiry in the ways I shall propose, it may be possible to recapture some of the wonder in which philosophy is said to have begun. The fact that we human

⁶Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), vi § 23. I have benefited from Sabina Lovibond’s reflections on this observation in *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 45 ff.

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beings do, indeed, achieve knowledge and understanding of the world in which, for no apparent reason, we find ourselves should, in view of its very unlikelihood, elicit amazement, wonder, and respect. Indeed, I believe it is vital to the fruitful continuation of any kind of epistemological project that this attitude of wonder be sustained as long as it inspires constructive reflection rather than mute amazement.

I

Intellectual Virtue

CHAPTER 2

Father and Son: A Case Study

Introduction: The Gosse Case

“There is a peculiar agony in the paradox that truth has two forms, each of them indisputable, yet each antagonistic to the other.” Thus, in *Father and Son*,¹ Edmund Gosse characterizes his father’s intellectual crisis of 1857. The crisis arose out of the elder Gosse’s struggles to reconcile his Christian fundamentalism (hence his creationism) with the insights he stood to gain, as a marine zoologist, from work being done in evolutionary theory by Darwin, Lyell, and others. From this conflict, religion emerged victorious. Philip Gosse, F.R.S., chose to discount the findings of the new biology because of their incompatibility with his belief in the literal truth of the creation story as set forth in the book of *Genesis*. Here I shall reflect upon the epistemic responsibility of his decision.

The elder Gosse’s near-fanatical devotion to truth emerges most strikingly from his son’s account. This puritanical devotion leads him to forbid the reading of fiction in the house because of its potentially corrupting effect upon his son’s mind (the younger Gosse states his theme in this work to be “the diagnosis of a dying Puritanism”).² It is clearly impossible to applaud this mani-

¹ Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 74.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5. For purposes of this discussion, I am reading the younger Gosse’s account quite straightforwardly in order to illustrate an epistemological point. Clearly, this account is told from a certain perspective, and by no means a disinterested one. The details of the conflict as it is seen through the author’s eyes,

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festation of devotion to truth. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that the portrait drawn here is of a person who strives constantly to achieve intellectual and moral virtue. He sets rigorously high standards for himself in his relationship to the world and places a high value upon intellectual integrity. He is a person whom a community of knowers, in areas of reliance upon the testimony of others, might reasonably be expected to trust.

Yet consider the son's depiction of his father's character, aspects of which seem to contribute to his epistemological crisis:

[H]e was incapable, by temperament and education, of forming broad generalizations and of essaying in a vast survey from the troublesome pettiness of detail. He saw everything through a lens, nothing in the immensity of nature. Certain senses were absent in him; I think that, with all his justice, he had no conception of the importance of liberty; with all his intelligence, the boundaries of the atmosphere in which his mind could think at all were always close about him; with all his faith in the Word of God, he had no confidence in the Divine Benevolence; and with all his passionate piety, he habitually mistook fear for love.³

Clearly, this description enjoins caution in judging him virtuous, yet, although one cannot be judged virtuous solely in view of one good action, virtue is, nonetheless, something that admits of degree. It is not reasonable to judge him vicious, either; simply less than perfectly virtuous.

Now even within a conception of virtue such as the one I shall develop, whose orientation is broadly Aristotelian, it is not clear that devotion to truth should be characterized as a virtue best possessed in moderation. It seems unreasonable to urge that too much truth is as bad as too little, that one should seek the middle way. To urge the middle way is to praise half-truth. Yet Gosse's autobiographical narrative is particularly successful in bringing the implications of fanatical—one might indeed say “excessive”—truthfulness to light. The limitations consciously imposed upon

however, show something of what an intellectual crisis of this sort is like, even though it is only one way of construing the situation (and an emotionally fraught one at that) and even though Philip Gosse might have presented his own situation quite differently, as might others who knew him. I am assuming enough reliability on the part of the narrator to permit the elaboration I shall develop.

³Ibid., pp. 95–96.

the imagination by his father, as manifested in his intentional abstention from the potentially self-revealing experience of literature, interfere with the development of wholeness of character. It is his lack of self-knowledge, in part, that makes it difficult to deem the elder Gosse wholly responsible from an epistemic point of view.

On first acquaintance, however, Philip Gosse appears to be both scrupulous and painstaking, epistemically, in both of the central, conflicting realms of his epistemic life. One reads of hours spent, both alone and with his wife, puzzling over the scriptures in order better to understand God's teachings, of how this religious belief permeates all aspects of his life, and of his membership in a community of believers who share and argue over interpretations of the scriptures. All these are perfectly respectable approaches to a question of knowledge or belief: this is no blind faith. Curiously, though, the very single-mindedness of his actions makes one hesitate to deem them virtuous. Though it seems unlikely that integrity, any more than truth, could be judged excessive, Gosse's complete abstinence from self-criticism, together with his failure to step outside to look at what he is doing, makes one wonder whether there can be too much integrity.⁴

Gosse does not come across as completely single-minded, though. At least he wavers a little in the course of the conflict under discussion here, if only to reaffirm his convictions. Interestingly, he seems to be more scrupulous, epistemically, with regard to the losing side of the dilemma than he is with the side that emerges victorious. Scientific enquiry too is a knowledge-seeking endeavor to which he is fully committed. He is a painstaking and indefatigable researcher who enjoys the respect of the scientific community, a man well in touch with the current state of the art in his area of expertise. His method and attitude in scientific procedure seem to be virtual paradigms of responsibility. He is attuned, too, to the normative role of character models in cultures and scientific subcultures: a point I shall elaborate

⁴See Raimond Gaita's discussion of this point in his reply to Gabriele Taylor's paper, "Integrity," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55, suppl. (1981).

more fully below. So, for example, while Owen, the creationist, was urging reaction against the new theories “with all the strength of his prestige, . . . every instinct in his [Gosse’s] intelligence went out at first to greet the new light.”⁵ When it transpired, finally, that he was unable to endorse evolutionism, *his* prestige crumbled. The appeal to *Genesis* would not allow him to move.

Intellectual virtue is, above all, a matter of orientation toward the world, toward one’s knowledge-seeking self, and toward other such selves as part of the world. Central to it is a sort of openness to how things are: a respect for the normative force of “realism.” This attitude involves a willingness to let things speak for themselves, a kind of humility toward the experienced world that curbs any excessive desire to impose one’s cognitive structurings upon it. Intellectual honesty consists in a finely tuned balancing of these two factors, in cultivating an appropriate interplay between self and world.

Initially, Gosse seems virtuous in just this respect. One notes his reverent perusal both of the scriptures and of marine species. His discoveries are inspired as much by the wonder of what he finds in the Bible or in tidal pools as by what he already believes. There is a reasonable balance between (admittedly) theory-laden enquiry and open-mindedness. Up to this point, then, a person seeking to know either about the meaning of scripture or about the nature of marine species would be well advised to consult Philip Gosse: a rightfully respected *character*, a worthy exemplar of intellectual virtue, and a reputable source of information in either domain.

Until the time of the conflict, Gosse’s belief in God seems well-warranted and, indeed, capable of strengthening and corroborating the results of his scientific endeavors. His integrity in holding the belief is evident; its effects are consistent throughout his life. It would be difficult to condemn him as irresponsible in his belief. Likewise, his belief in the scope and validity of his scientific research seems to be fully responsible. His results stand up under the scrutiny of the Royal Society, he continues to make new discoveries, and internal inconsistencies within the system

⁵Gosse, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

seemingly do not arise. Gosse is watchful for new findings and aware of the need to adjust the boundaries of the system accordingly. In scientific practice too, then (until the point of conflict), his stance seems to be justified.

The problem, as it takes shape, involves the boundaries of two ultimately conflicting systems. The two sides of the conflict are like two circles of a simple Venn diagram, with a substantial area of overlap. Two fundamental convictions coexist in this area: the conviction that God created the world for human beings to explore and know and that scientific research glorifies God, unravelling His secrets and discovering the wonders of His creation. Devotion to truth in science and in scripture merge here. But the boundaries of the circles are so heavily drawn that they seem to enclose all that can be known. Gosse is not prepared to consider that it might be possible, and indeed desirable, to look at one's (putative) knowledge from the outside, to suspend belief in order to reflect upon what one has been doing. With both the religious and the scientific communities, he seems to have locked himself in to a mode of intellectual practice that does not, and perhaps as he conceives it, cannot, allow a self-critical stance.

Gosse is a man obsessed with a particular kind of literalness. Because of his conviction that there can be only one Truth, he finds himself restricted to truncated categories of understanding and interpretation. It is one thing to profess a profound concern for truth, but quite another matter to insist that, if a point of view is important and valid, then it must be literally and exclusively true. Gosse cannot allow himself to entertain alternatives, to acknowledge the weight of evidence supporting the new biology but to "bracket" it, not committing himself until he has explored the possibilities for rendering his conflicting allegiances compatible. At certain points in the crisis, he comes across as something of a fanatic, as a person (to borrow Annette Baier's description) "whose objects of care are so important to him that he will not risk scrutinizing them."⁶ Now one must not minimize

⁶ Annette Baier, "Caring about Caring: A Reply to Frankfurt," in *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 93.

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the importance of wariness against too much openness within the religious tradition to which Gosse belongs. There is a constant danger of seduction by false views. It is at least arguable, however, that one who has examined alternative positions might be a better believer, in the long run, than one who has shied dogmatically away from them. Integrity, pushed to such an extreme, threatens to become a character defect.

To stand outside the truth of the *Genesis* account would, for Gosse, be blasphemy. The system is *internally justifying* in the sense that no scrutiny from without can be admitted. To stand outside the scientific account seems to be possible only by establishing oneself more firmly within the circle that represents religious belief. The scientific circle does acquire some cracks in the course of the conflict, but Gosse only blocks them more tightly and, indeed, enlarges the area of overlap between the two circles. Ultimately, the old style of scientific investigation is continued purely for the glorification of God, in renewed affirmation of the truth of *Genesis*, since it has now met with scorn from the scientific community.⁷

With hindsight, given how the creationism/evolutionism debate has continued to be waged, one might suggest that a willingness to make the boundaries of both circles fuzzy rather than solid might have spared Gosse his conflict without damaging his integrity. This has clearly become an option in later times. Whether it could have been an option then is not so clear; perhaps the thesis/antithesis/(possible) synthesis pattern of the debate was necessary. None the less, it seems that Gosse might have remained open to the possibility of reconciling the two sides in his struggle. His insistence upon infallibility, his unwillingness to opt for justification as opposed to absolute confirmation, prevented him

⁷This literally describes how Gosse proceeded. In a book he called *Omphalos*, he argues that just as Adam was created with a navel, the sign of a birth that did not take place, so God created the entire earth with all the fossil relics of a past that did not exist except in His (i.e. God's) own mind. That book, Martin Gardner maintains, "presented a theory so logically perfect, and so in accord with geological facts that no amount of scientific evidence will ever be able to refute it" (Martin Gardner, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* [New York: Dover Publications, 1957], p. 125).

from considering the “fuzzy” option and weakened his position.

I think, in fact, that it weakened his position precisely where the most central of the intellectual virtues is concerned: with regard to epistemic responsibility. The ramifications of this are instructive. It might seem, initially, that epistemic responsibility is a matter of tenacity: of affirming one’s position and holding to it, come what may. Gosse’s case makes plain, though, that this virtue, like the Aristotelian virtues, is to be located at a mean.⁸

Viewed in another way, the problem has much to do with self-knowledge. Gosse’s failure is primarily a failure of reflexivity. His integrity, which immediately invites praise with respect to both major belief systems, is an *enclosed integrity*, hence it carries the seeds of its own condemnation. Here is a person who is quite unaware of his own dogmatism.⁹ At the same time, he is unaware of the effects upon his work of the compartmentalization in his life. Finally, he is so convinced of his (God-inspired) rightness that he is deaf to self-critical imperatives. All these factors lead, ultimately, to a failure in integrity, wisdom, and epistemic responsibility.

Wisdom involves understanding the need to see cognitive endeavors in context so as to achieve a just estimation of their significance. That Gosse fails in this respect is evident from the discussion so far. This failure diminishes his reliability from an epistemic point of view. With it goes a curious reversal of the kind of intelligence manifested in efforts not to be unduly swayed by affectivity, for Gosse errs here in the opposite direction. In

⁸Sabina Lovibond (op. cit., p. 170) observes that there is “nothing inherently irrational in a determination to resist change. Such a determination is irrational only if the proposed innovation is more rational than what currently exists.” The problem with Gosse’s resolution of his dilemma is that he seems not to have paused sufficiently to consider whether the new theory is more rational than the old.

⁹Writing of Hume’s distrust of religious fervor, Annette Baier notes that Hume sees the “stupefaction of the understanding” as a manifestation of such fervor. She remarks that “a certain resistance to self-consciousness is built into the religious believer’s attitude, that practices of the religious, in as far as they are dependent on religious belief, do not bear what Hume called ‘reflexion’” (“Civilising Practices,” in op. cit., p. 259). It would be a mistake to agree too hastily with Hume about this characteristic as generally true of religious believers. But something of the sort does seem to happen with Gosse.

consequence of his efforts not to be swayed *at all* by affectivity, he narrows his vision to the point where it is increasingly difficult to judge him epistemically responsible. If there is a vice to be declared here, it would seem to be that of *akrasia*, following Amélie Rorty's observation to the effect that "a person can akratically abridge an inquiry, being aware that it would lead to his having to reconsider a range of treasured beliefs."¹⁰ This is just what Gosse does. Reflecting upon his dilemma, one is reminded of how closely virtue and integrity are connected with finding the "right mean."

Foundations, Coherence, and Narrative

Although it would be difficult to decide how justified Gosse's ultimate stance is by appealing to foundationalist and/or coherentist criteria alone, certain initial steps can be suggested. A foundationalist might examine each of the rival positions to ascertain which, if either, is the more firmly grounded. Tracing both sets of beliefs back to their origins in sensory experience would not be easy, however, since they purport to offer rival explanations of what the senses observe (fossils, for example), and neither the evolutionary process, nor God, is directly amenable to observation. It is difficult to refute the case Gosse makes in *Omphalos* for this very reason. The enquiry, then, might end in impasse, with the conclusion that both creationism and evolutionism are simply hypotheses, neither with any reasonable claim to be more foundational than the other. If, however, one had to choose one position over the other, creationism might emerge triumphant for reasons that seem, though only superficially, to resemble Gosse's own. One might argue that God, as creator of the world and of human knowers in perfect harmony with one another, stands as the guarantor of all knowledge, which He, benevolently, allows the faithful and/or those who pursue the correct method to

¹⁰ Amélie Rorty, "Akratic Believers," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, No. 2 (April 1983): 179. Also see John Heil's interesting discussion of the vice of "doxastic incontinence," characterized by an agent's believing "*in the teeth of the evidence*," in his "Doxastic Incontinence," *Mind* 93 (1984): 65.

have. He could not, by His very nature, deceive. This argument would amount to *establishing* foundations by appealing to God's veracity, hence avoiding regress through a quasi-Cartesian move.

Coherentism might initially appear to fare somewhat better, for critics of the creationist/evolutionist debate often seem to assume, especially now that its initial fervor has passed, that *both* positions are coherent—they simply offer alternative ways of explaining the same set of events. For Gosse, however, were he to overcome his *akrasia* and adopt a self-critical stance, this would be of little help. His dilemma still arises since, even if both positions are inherently coherent, he cannot accommodate them both within his “acceptance system.” The *Genesis* account of creation within the space of seven days, literally read, is incompatible with the account of gradual mutation, adaptation, and selective survival offered by evolutionists. To accept the latter, he would have to see God as a deceiver who planted deceptive clues throughout the created universe, largely to give scientists something to puzzle over. Because of the nature and rigor of his belief, he cannot see God in this light. At the point where these two putatively coherent systems try to establish contact with reality, they are incompatible; to accept one is, necessarily, to declare the falsity of the other. Gosse, then, is not simply faced with a problem about whether or how he can fit a “new” piece of knowledge into an existing system, separate from him and accessible to his intellectual contemplation, nor is this matter merely one of confronting different systems of propositions, one of which is to be “objectively” selected for endorsement. He is already in the midst of both conflicting systems, firmly committed to each, faced with deciding what truths he can live with coherently—a question of intellectual integrity.

The kinds of questions foundationalists and coherentists might raise about this situation are determined, in part, by a cluster of interrelated presuppositions, some of which I have mentioned in chapter 1. Among these assumptions are (1) that knowledge properly so-called is autonomous in that it is of no epistemological significance whose it is; (2) that knowledge acquisition may be of psychological interest but is irrelevant to an epistemologist's

quest for criteria of justification, validity, and verification; and (3) that knowledge is objective in the sense that discussion of the character and epistemic circumstances of subjects has nothing to contribute to the proper epistemological task of assessing the product.

Theorists of knowledge who work from such presuppositions can focus upon fairly thin descriptions of epistemic problems and produce some worthwhile conclusions. We need to be in a position to derive other kinds of conclusions, though, in assessing complex knowledge claims and doxastic positions, and it is not clear that standard examples are rich enough to provide the basis for such derivations. We must also be able to account for the facts: (1) that knowledge claims and efforts to know are events or processes in human lives; they emerge out of interaction amongst knowledge seekers, their communities, and the world; (2) that there is no knowledge without knowers, no knowledge without context; and (3) that knowledge cannot be stored equally in a computer or a human mind, because people have attitudes to knowledge that shape both its structure and its content. These facts would not be clear from a thin description of the Gosse case, which could merely state that Philip Gosse became ineffectual as a scientist because of his belief in two conflicting theories. From this description it would not be possible to understand either the scrupulous nature of his preconflict endeavors or the agony of the conflict itself. Because of the limited explanatory capacity of foundationalist and coherentist approaches to complex epistemic situations like Gosse's (and because of the commonness of less global versions of such dilemmas in everyday epistemic life), a complementary proposal for assessing what happens in Gosse's case, and in others like it, must be developed.

A "responsibilist" approach to epistemology, for which epistemic responsibility is a pivotal normative concept, offers just such a possibility. This approach denies the autonomy of the known, maintaining that the nature of the knower and of his/her environment and epistemic community are epistemologically relevant, for they act as enabling and/or constraining factors in the growth of knowledge, both for individuals and for

communities. To show how such factors are relevant, “thickly” descriptive accounts are needed.¹¹

Alasdair MacIntyre is perhaps thinking of accounts like this when, in *After Virtue*, he declares the importance of narrative for understanding human *lives*.¹² He maintains that virtue can only feasibly be seen as a way of life when life is construed as a whole, a connected history, a structured narrative. Actions or motives, considered out of context, provide no adequate basis for assessments of moral worth. The same, I am convinced, is true for an account of cognition in terms of intellectual virtue. To have an adequate understanding of what it is to be virtuous, whether morally or intellectually, one must understand virtue as part of “a concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life and death as narrative beginning to middle to end,” to use MacIntyre’s words.¹³

Virtue, either intellectual or moral, is an attribute of character. One good action cannot make a virtuous person any more

¹¹ I do not mean to suggest that there is, in the history of philosophy, no discussion of knowledge in context. A notable example, open to elaboration when describing what actually happens in epistemic life, is American pragmatist philosophy. In their various ways, James, Dewey, Peirce, and Lewis all put forward textured accounts of the way knowledge emerges in *lives*, in the context of specific concerns and purposes, and in interaction with the environment and with other knowledge seekers. The view I am putting forward here is, in many respects, compatible with central aspects of these versions of pragmatism. My emphasis upon *responsibility* and its significance throughout epistemic life, however, distinguishes my position from pragmatism in its separate elaborations.

¹² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981). It should be mentioned, though, that MacIntyre’s belief in the value of narrative sometimes seems to derive from overly superficial readings. He is too ready to take such accounts at face value, making too little of the fact that a narrative is always told from a point of view and that any move to privilege one point of view over another must be acknowledged. Because of the contribution of unconscious factors to the shape and content of a narrative (both in what it includes and what it excludes), this point is as true for first person narratives as it is for second and third person ones.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 191. The point is not that understanding of this sort can be achieved only from the sort of narrative that actually recounts the *whole* of a life from birth to death. Often the “life as a whole” is merely implicit, but the implied unity is in some sense palpable, drawing together the strands of past, present, and possible future into the set of interlocking events. Something of this unity is evident, for example, in Camus’ *The Outsider* and in Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

than, to paraphrase Aristotle, one swallow can make a summer. Aristotle's virtuous man is virtuous because of the connectedness of his life—his relations to himself and to his society are of a piece. Analogously, the effectiveness of an epistemic agent emanates from his or her epistemic responsibility, a pervasive attribute of character. A human being is neither an epistemic agent nor a moral agent in a vacuum, and the peculiar value of narrative lies in its capacity to fill in a textured context where there might otherwise have wrongly seemed to be simply a series of isolated actions. Connections have to be drawn between the various strands of a life if a reasonable assessment of virtue is to be made. Thus, from reading the Gosse story, one can see some of the tangled connections between the moral and cognitive strands in this life and understand that it is not enough simply to dismiss his separate beliefs as unwarranted. The connections cannot be denied or ignored. Here is someone who, in most respects, is as responsible an epistemic agent as one might hope to encounter but who, puzzlingly, comes adrift. Through the narrative, one sees how this could occur.

It is not that cognition, virtue, integrity, and selfhood can only be understood through the medium of narrative, nor that they can be fully understood through this medium alone. These concepts are complex and, if they are to be understood at all, they must be approached from many different angles. It does seem to be true, however, that one cannot hope to understand human action in isolation from lives, histories, contexts, and narratives, and I think it is equally true that one cannot hope to understand cognitive activity and intellectual virtue apart from lives, histories, and contexts. But any understanding one achieves is only one way of understanding, a perspective, which may always need to be revised in light of subsequent or alternative accounts. Lives may not be as "unified" as MacIntyre would like them to be.

The idea that philosophical concepts can be better understood when they are discussed within the context of human lives is not new in the history of philosophy, but it has not been much in fashion of late. Its best known and earliest appearance is in Plato's Socratic dialogues. Plato is clearly aware that one can best understand what is involved in complex notions such as justice,

piety, and virtue by seeing them at work in human lives. The dramatic dialogue, therefore, is more illuminating than a more straightforwardly discursive, analytic account would be. The latter type of account cannot adequately capture such notions. "Knowing well" is, in this respect, very like the notions Socrates explores in his efforts to answer the question, "What is x ?" Even when epistemology is construed, primarily, as a first person endeavor to develop strategies for acquiring knowledge and judging knowledge claims, the conclusions drawn will be better and more discerning about how the strategy could appropriately be put to work if one can show by example what its possibilities are. Such is the value of context and narrative: not to dispense with the need to analyze and develop strategies but to give a fuller picture of the complexities with which analysis and strategy must come to terms.

For MacIntyre, "Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterisation of human action."¹⁴ He is right, I think, although I see it as *a* rather than *the* basic and essential genre. An action cannot be judged morally right simply because it is performed by a virtuous person, nor must a knowledge claim be proclaimed correct because of the intellectual virtue of the claimant. In each case, though, the character of the agent is of central relevance to how the action or claim will be judged.

Closely related to the importance he attaches to narrative and the unity of lives is MacIntyre's view about *character* as the source of a culture's moral definitions. He refers, in this connection, to a type of dramatic tradition, "which possesses a set of stock characters immediately recognisable to the audience,"¹⁵ citing Japanese Noh plays and medieval English morality plays as examples. He sees an analogy between the way in which members of a culture understand such characters and the way in which certain kinds of social roles, specific to particular cultures, provide contexts of

¹⁴MacIntyre, op. cit., p. 194. MacIntyre's sympathy for seeing this idea as applicable in intellectual as well as moral activity is clear both from his paper, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* 60, No. 4 (1977), and from his sixth Carlyle Lecture, delivered at Oxford University, June 1982.

¹⁵MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 26.

understanding. He writes, "The ability to recognize them is socially crucial because knowledge of the character provides an interpretation of the actions of those individuals who have achieved the character."¹⁶ *Character*, thus construed, is much more than a social role: it is a type of role "which places a kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit [it] in a way in which many other social roles do not."¹⁷ In character thus understood, role and personality fuse to point toward moral ideals and define possibilities of action.¹⁸ (Examples of such *characters*, e.g., for Victorian England, are cited as the Public School Headmaster, the Explorer, the Engineer.) Communal understanding of such characters is achieved as often through literature as it is through the press or the oral tradition.

MacIntyre's most important contention in this context is that *characters* are the moral representatives of their culture, the masks worn by moral philosophies. Yet, his intention is not to imply that the moral beliefs expressed by and embodied in such *characters* find universal acceptance within the culture, as the instantiation of moral ideals. The fact that they most probably do not is all to the good, for they then provide a culture with focal points for conflict and disagreement, catalysts of moral change. In

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Henri Bergson, in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (translated by R. A. Andra and C. Brereton, with W. H. Carter [New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935]), puts forward a view strongly reminiscent of this idea, at least in the second source of morality he designates. The two sources, he maintains, are *pressure* and *aspiration*: pressure is defined as "a system of *orders* dictated by *impersonal* social requirements"; and aspiration spelled out as "a series of *appeals* made to the conscience of each of us by *persons* who represent the best there is in humanity" (p. 75). Such persons, for Bergson, are the saints of Christianity, the sages of Greece, the Arahants of Buddhism: a somewhat differently slanted selection from MacIntyre's, given Bergson's intention to account for sources of *religion* and of morality. The identity of the character models, though, is not as important as the role they play: that of "exceptional men, incarnating [a specific] morality. . . . It is to them that men have always turned for that complete morality which we had best call absolute morality" (pp. 25–26). I do not think *pressure* alone could achieve the development of a virtue-based morality. Character models show something of what can be achieved; they bring possibilities of moral (and intellectual) goodness into relief so as to enable people to understand their implications. They show why virtue is to be advocated and valued and what kind of life its possessor might achieve.

MacIntyre's view moral definitions are by no means static or permanent.

The idea that *characters* also embody a culture's definition of intellectual virtue is equally plausible. Consider, for example, the epistemic prestige of the Nobel prize winner. It is as a *character*, understood analogously to MacIntyre's moral *characters*, that Philip Gosse makes such a good model for this study of epistemic responsibility and intellectual virtue. Edmund Gosse declares his intention to show the reader "a state of soul not uncommon in Protestant Europe, of which my parents were perhaps the latest consistent exemplars among people of light and leading."¹⁹ His father is a vividly drawn character whose story gives personal content to a widely experienced shift in intellectual orientation. The conflict inherent in the moral and intellectual dilemma he faces is of the kind that, in MacIntyre's view, is often central to the struggle to maintain a virtuous life. In this case the conflict is one MacIntyre would, rightly, construe as tragic, for it is between two goods not simultaneously realizable.

Drawing attention to the importance of narrative shows the comparative irrelevance of appeals to foundationalist or coherentist criteria alone for cognitive agents in the midst of intellectual conflict. There is an analogy here with what is sometimes considered to be the poverty of utilitarianism as a theory of ethics: ethical life, it might be argued, is just not like that. Only by "underdescribing" what goes on in human moral quandaries can one hope to offer an account of ethical life in strictly utilitarian terms. Similar kinds of underdescription can serve as the basis for foundationalist or coherentist assessments of knowledge claims, though not in exactly the same way for each.

Now it is important to be able to judge whether knowledge claims are well founded and whether they fit coherently into an existing body of knowledge, but these matters are only part of what needs to be investigated in trying to understand human cognition. Analogously, utilitarian considerations are often central to situations of moral quandary, but they are unlikely to tell

¹⁹Gosse, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

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the whole story.²⁰ In *Father and Son*, by contrast, we find a fully fleshed-out example of the kind of conflict that arises in practice, for believers and would-be knowers, who are construed as characters existing through time. Hence we have an appropriate vantage point from which to understand the place of epistemic struggle in human lives.

The understanding and insights achieved through narrative are not purely psychological; they are much broader and more wide ranging. Psychological insight and empathetic understanding are involved, however, and it would be a serious mistake to suggest that such insights and understanding are not properly the business of a philosopher, particularly not of an epistemologist.²¹ To understand human beings better is to have a better basis for the kinds of philosophy particularly concerned with human beings and their relationships to themselves, to each other, and to the world. A moral philosophy that lacks underpinnings in a workable and insightful moral psychology must surely be inadequate.²² Analogously, and more importantly for my purposes, a theory of knowledge that lacks a reasonable understanding of how human beings can and do acquire and add to knowledge must be of doubtful relevance. Sound psychological insights form an invaluable, sine qua non basis for any theory of knowledge that purports to explicate the way human beings know. Good literature can be a rich source of such insights, hence my examination of *Father and Son*.²³

²⁰In chapter 3, I shall explore more fully the analogy between ethical and epistemological thinking.

²¹For denials of the relevance of psychology per se to epistemology, see, for example, D. W. Hamlyn, "Logical and Psychological Aspects of Learning," in *The Concept of Education*, ed. R. S. Peters (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973); and Karl Popper, "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject," in *Objective Knowledge* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972). By contrast, two papers by Susan Haack make a strong case in favor of the relevance of psychology to epistemology: "Epistemology With a Knowing Subject," *Review of Metaphysics* 33, No. 2 (December, 1979), and "The Relevance of Psychology to Philosophy," *Metaphilosophy* 6 (1975).

²²This is one of the central ideas in MacIntyre's *After Virtue* argument.

²³See my "Father and Son: A Case Study in Epistemic Responsibility" (*The Monist* 66, No. 2 [April 1983]) for a brief discussion of how *Father and Son*, as a creative work, provides better empathetic understanding of, and psychological insight into, this situation than does Gosse's official biography of his father (Ed-

Wittgenstein is probably right to observe that “if a lion could speak, we could not understand him.”²⁴ There often appear to be insurmountable conceptual barriers between forms of life and, hence, forms of knowing understood as forms of life. I am not convinced, however, that they are all *logically* insurmountable. Possibly, if the lion could enact or narrate a plausible story about his world, we might be able to understand him, at least a little. Analogously, by experiencing it in the narrative, the elder Gosse’s otherwise almost incomprehensible (and hence leonine, in Wittgenstein’s sense) creationist fervor becomes an attitude that one can respect, if not share, or at least understand, if not respect.²⁵ There is a tendency in contemporary thought to see scientific knowledge as the only “real” knowledge, hence to maintain that epistemology is best modeled upon its particular methodology. The narrative context elucidates some of the limitations of this kind of knowing, demonstrating the importance of E. M. Forster’s well-known injunction: “Only connect.” Integrity and epistemic responsibility are matters of how these connections are made.

Some Interim Conclusions

If Philip Gosse had been able to construe his two conflicting theories so that they reinforced one another instead of clashing, he

mund Gosse, *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S.* [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1890]. I discuss literature as a source of knowledge more fully in chapter 8.

²⁴Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 223.

²⁵I. C. Jarvie and J. Agassi explore an interesting case of such apparent insurmountability in their paper, “The Problem of the Rationality of Magic,” (in *Rationality*, ed. B. R. Wilson [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970]). The confrontation of Western scientific culture with “primitive” magic-oriented or magic-dominated cultures produces another conflict of two world views, apparently mutually incomprehensible, where the latter is only too easily dismissed as irrational by “parochial,” scientifically minded Western anthropologists. The authors point out that “viewing magic intellectually leads to seeing it as inferior; viewing it as an art of sorts . . . [prevents] comparison with science, but . . . [also] prevents imputations of inferiority” (p. 186). Here, too, there is the possibility, to some extent at least, of traversing or circumnavigating conceptual barriers between forms of life.

would have been a better scientist, for he would have been able to keep abreast of discoveries in his field. He might have been able to continue his scientific practice while keeping his religious belief very nearly intact. The two truths he finds both indisputable and incompatible are on such different levels that they need not necessarily conflict. But Gosse is unable to integrate his everyday professional life with his larger sense of what is important, so he effectively excludes himself from the scientific community, disqualifying himself as a “state of the art” practitioner. Given Thomas Kuhn’s demonstration²⁶ of the way paradigms (such as Darwinian theory) govern the practice of normal science and determine what counts as a puzzle worthy of solution, Gosse’s disqualification is not surprising. In itself, however, it does not provide reasons for judging him irresponsible: under some paradigms it might be more responsible not to be a practitioner. His actions do, however, involve undue repudiation of the “spirit of enquiry,” understood, rightly or wrongly, as characteristic of good scientific practice. It is difficult to read the dogmatism in that repudiation as a mark of exemplary intellectual character.

It is important neither to grant too much nor too little to knowledge seekers on the basis of adjudged epistemic responsibility. An action will not reasonably be judged right simply because it has been performed by a morally virtuous person, nor will a knowledge claim be reasonably declared correct simply because of the intellectual integrity of the claimant. In each case, though, the character of the agent constitutes a presumption in favor of taking the action or the claim seriously, of looking for an explanation if it seems aberrant, of not condemning it outright.²⁷ To say “but if S [say, Einstein, Keynes, or Jung] takes the claim that *p* seriously, *p* must merit serious consideration” in contexts where

²⁶ In Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

²⁷ An interesting example of just this kind of practice in newspaper reporting is worth noting. Writing of the Franks Committee’s report on the British government’s responsibilities in the Falklands war, Jeffrey Simpson observes: “The committee chairman was Lord Franks, a Liberal peer with an outstanding record of diplomatic and academic achievement. *His reputation*, and the presence of members from all parties on the committee, *gave the report an unquestioned authority*” (Toronto, *The Globe and Mail*, 19 January 1983; my emphasis.)

S's expertise is relevant is not to be excessively credulous. When we study the works of thinkers of repute, we constantly engage in considerations of this sort, taking time over the work because of the reputation of the thinker. It would be fallacious to conclude that *p* must be *true* because S takes it seriously, but it is not fallacious to take it seriously as well.

Caution, of course, is necessary. In Gosse's case, it would be excessively simplistic to conclude that *because* Gosse clung to his belief in God and *because* he was in many respects such an upright individual, *therefore* there must be some truth in Christianity, and indeed in creationism. No more can one argue that just because Americans in Arkansas still want to teach creationism there must be some truth in it. Everyone concerned might well be wrong. The degree, though imperfect, of Gosse's integrity does lend credence to his view though. It is worth asking, again because of his integrity, whether, with some of the fanaticism pared away, there might remain something worthy of belief. If there were good reasons for believing that the people of Arkansas are reactionary bigots, there would be a strong presumption against giving their request a hearing. The situation changes, however, when members of the scientific community, who have demonstrated their qualifications in addressing such matters and been epistemically responsible in so doing, suggest that evolutionary theory is not yet conclusively established, at least, not in terms of telling the whole story. According to this view, questions about whether it is reasonable or foolish to entertain certain beliefs become more pressing than questions about whether, according to the law of noncontradiction, one belief must be declared false if another is true. In the communal aspect of the knowledge-seeking process, much depends upon how epistemic authorities establish their credentials.

Even well-established credentials cannot guarantee absolute rather than provisional conclusions. Consider, by way of contrast, the case of Galileo versus the Church Fathers. Here, the Church Fathers are the ones whose credentials are better established in the public eye, yet, both in epistemic responsibility and in terms of subsequent scientific developments, Galileo emerges triumphant. There is a striking similarity here with the Gosse

case, too: the stance of the Church Fathers is most notable for its dogmatic, reactionary nature. (The point, however, is not that this case is clear and unproblematic, the Gosse one, more complex. Galileo *emerges* triumphant in part because his discoveries, ultimately, stand the test of time, whereas the stance of the Church Fathers is discredited both for its extreme closed-mindedness and because of what has come to be accepted as scientific “fact.” The example is thus apt in this context. During the process, however, Galileo himself is often extremely dogmatic, and his recantation is highly problematic from the point of view of epistemic responsibility.)

Clearly, neither the strength of a belief nor the believer’s inability to waver are in themselves enough to give the content of that belief full credence. This is Wittgenstein’s point in *On Certainty*, where he goes to some lengths to show that the degree of certainty with which a knowledge claim is made is irrelevant to the certainty of the knowledge itself. He writes, “The wrong use made by Moore of the proposition ‘I know . . .’ lies in his regarding it as an utterance as little subject to doubt as ‘I am in pain.’”²⁸ Moore’s putative paradigms of certain knowledge are statements only about Moore’s own state of mind, a “mental state of conviction [which] may be the same whether it is knowledge or false belief.”²⁹ Relating these points to Gosse, it would evidently make nonsense of all epistemology to conclude that just because Gosse believes so strongly, his convictions must be accepted as true. This descriptive account does not purport to offer Gosse’s fervor as an alternative sort of foundation for knowledge. Rather, it shows that judging beliefs and knowledge claims from this kind of perspective is like judging the actions of the morally virtuous. It yields no guarantee that an action is right or a claim valid. It can, in light of the quality of character from which actions and knowledge claims originate, give some idea of their worth.

²⁸Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), § 178.

²⁹*Ibid.*, § 42.

CHAPTER 3

Toward a “Responsibilist” Epistemology

“The Raft and the Pyramid”

In an important paper, “The Raft and the Pyramid,”¹ Ernest Sosa proposes a potentially fruitful approach to theory of knowledge. Having shown that the foundationalist pyramid *has* no ultimate foundations and that the coherentist raft must inevitably find itself adrift, Sosa suggests that “reliabilism,” as he calls it, might offer a better route to establishing conditions of justification for knowledge claims. This would be an account of knowledge and justification in terms of, and based upon, intellectual virtues. Such an epistemology would roughly parallel an ethical position based upon moral virtues; it would be analogous to such a position, but not derivative from it.

Two closely related lines of thought in Sosa’s paper are particularly significant for my purposes. First, he repeatedly indicates that discussions of knowledge and/or belief are discussions of *someone’s* knowledge and/or belief. Hence the knower, as well as the known, is accorded epistemological significance. Second, where both coherentism and foundationalism seem to encounter difficulties, he draws analogies with ethical thinking. This leads to the concluding claim that viewing epistemology as

¹ Ernest Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy V*, ed. P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, Jr., and H. K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 3–25.

analogous to ethics provides a useful perspective on epistemological questions that is neither purely coherentist nor strictly foundationalist.

In his interpretation of foundationalist and coherentist approaches to knowledge, Sosa shows, for example, that a central concern for each theory is to ask how beliefs are related in a given mind,² that an epistemologist has to consider the condition, structure, or content of a body of knowledge in someone's possession,³ that when we speak of knowledge or belief we are in fact speaking of the knowledge or belief of a particular subject at a given time—of what S believes at t⁴—and that coherentism is a view about the relations among the beliefs of the subject.⁵ It is not, I think, Sosa's intention to suggest that foundationalists and coherentists uniformly or explicitly declare the epistemological significance of knowing subjects. He intends, rather, to make explicit the hitherto implicit importance of knowers or would-be knowers and of what we might call their epistemic "location"—in a time, a place, and in epistemologically relevant circumstances.

According importance to the epistemological circumstances of subjects is not without its difficulties. Central among these difficulties is the risk of giving the impression that one is advocating an outrightly subjectivistic epistemology.⁶ But this would be to draw too hasty a conclusion. The claim that knowing subjects are epistemologically important in no way entails the further claim that an account of the nature of their cognitive circumstances

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 18.

⁶This is, presumably, part of the motivation behind Karl Popper's efforts to dispense with the knowing subject, for example in "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject." In his concern to reject what he construes to be the individualistic nature of traditional epistemology, Popper proposes complete objectivity as a more desirable alternative. But the "individuals" of the tradition he claims to reject are not persons in any significant sense. I, too, advocate a departure from the individualistic tradition, whose subjects are not really selves. In its place, though, I advocate an approach to epistemology that recognizes the importance of real human knowing subjects and of the commonality of cognitive endeavor, with the responsibilities that that recognition involves. (This will be the theme of chapter 7.) It is fundamental to my view that communities of knowers are made up of *persons* who make knowledge claims. The quality of the product is dependent upon the quality of their combined or cooperative efforts.

can bear the full weight of epistemological explanation or justification. When I ask, "But *who told you* that Nixon really was a good president," I certainly do not mean to suggest that if X told you, it is bound to be true but if Y told you, it is bound to be false. I mean, rather, to assert that the integrity of your source is a crucial component in my decision about whether or not to accept what you say, or even whether to consider it seriously. My estimation of your reliability in relaying testimony is equally important.

The matter is complex. My point is not that, if X told you and X is reliable, then it must be true, using X's reliability as an alternative foundation for acceptance, open to all the well-known pitfalls of strict foundationalism. I mean to say, rather, that prominent among my considerations in assessing a knowledge claim is evidence about whether the person at its source is in a position to know.⁷ That person's intellectual integrity counts as a significant part of the evidence in much the same way as, in moral matters, a person's moral integrity is a determining factor in decisions as to whether she or he should be trusted. These varieties of integrity are objectively describable, even if not exhaustively, ultimately, or foundationally describable. The importance accorded to persons as knowers, therefore, is accorded in so far as conditions (an open-ended set) can be spelled out for the reasonableness of respecting their claims to know in specific sets or kinds of circumstances.

Sosa's analogies with ethics will help to amplify and clarify these points. These analogies are drawn, first, in consequence of his demonstration that strict foundationalism, for which justification of belief is parasitical upon certain logical relations among propositions, cannot avoid falling into regress in its search for ultimate, foundational beliefs that are not justified by other beliefs. His point is not that all regress is necessarily vicious, but that unless foundationalism can allow evaluative (i.e., justificatory) properties to supervene upon natural, nonepistemic properties, it cannot, in fact, be founded. Second, he shows that coherentism depends for its contact with reality upon what amount

⁷Sosa has a useful discussion about what is involved in being in a position to know in "How Do You Know?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11, No. 2 (1974).

to foundationalist claims. If a coherent system is not simply to be free floating and, hence, of equal explanatory value with any other coherent system, it must, at some point, attach itself to events or circumstances in the world. This requirement inevitably gives rise to questions about how its claim to offer a correct account of these circumstances is substantiated or founded: clearly a question about foundations. Attempts to answer these questions in purely formal terms would be open to the same pitfalls of regress as is any foundationalist position. Hence analogies with ethics are introduced to show that, just as it is “a goal of ethics to explain how the ethical rightness of an action supervenes on what is not ethically evaluative or normative,” so too it is “a goal of epistemology to explain how the epistemic justification of a belief supervenes on what is not epistemically evaluative or normative.”⁸

Sosa attributes the coherentist and foundationalist problems he has analyzed, at least in part, to a pervasive epistemological endorsement of what he calls the “Intellectualist Model of Justification,”⁹ where justification of a knowledge claim is always to be sought in a *proposition* more fundamental, in some sense, than the claim itself. Rather than seeking *propositions* to ground other propositions and hence sliding unavoidably into regress, then, the proposal is that one look at *practices* in which a belief shows itself justified. The point is not, simply, that if a belief *works* when it is acted upon, then it is automatically justified, regardless of the nature and/or value of the practical context. It is, rather, that locating a belief within cognitive practice moves constructively away from intellectualist justification, showing more clearly how justification supervenes upon nonepistemic factors, just as the justification of practices themselves supervenes upon considerations extrinsic to those practices. This would be analogous to a route one might take when evaluating a moral belief.

For consequentialist ethics, an action is judged right or wrong in virtue of the consequences it brings about. The rightness or wrongness of these consequences derives from an ultimate moral

⁸ “The Raft and the Pyramid,” p. 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

principle—as ultimate, presumably, as a principle *can* be—about what kinds of consequences are good for human beings, what kinds are bad. The “ultimacy” of the principle, within the context of the system of justification, blocks descent into regress. (In drawing this analogy, my point is not to urge consequentialism as the best of all possible moral theories, but, through recalling how moral reasoning works within a consequentialist framework, to propose an analogous possibility for epistemological reasoning.) The consequences of an action can never show that action to be absolutely justified. But they can, for consequentialists, demonstrate its justification for (a) particular agent(s) in certain circumstances. Analogously, the practical consequences of holding certain beliefs have considerable bearing upon the reasonableness, for S at *t*, of holding the belief.

These points must, of course, be elaborated with caution. I do not mean to endorse a facile form of epistemic opportunism, according to which it is all right for me to believe what I will as long as the outcome is advantageous in some way. (Hence I could have believed Nixon to be a good president just when his integrity was under scrutiny if so doing would have been profitable.) My point rather is that something can be learned, epistemologically, from the way ethical judgments are grounded for a consequentialist theory. To take a very simple example, a belief that fire cannot burn me will have serious practical consequences if I act upon it. These consequences show not only that it is unjustifiable for me to hold the belief, but also that the belief is false. Now this example is more clear-cut than most ethical or epistemological examples will be, by dint of its degree of conclusiveness. But it makes the point that beliefs are grounded because of what happens in the *world*, not because of propositional entailments. Whether or not beliefs or knowledge claims are, or can be, valid for all times, or whether even such taken-for-granted beliefs as the one I have just cited are corrigible or fallible, is a separate question.

To pursue the analogy with ethics, the next step would be to ask whether a belief must (as many foundationalists insist) be infallible in order to play a foundational role. Here a crucial move

is to make *justification* a focal point so that what is justified can be recognized as well warranted because there are no discernible reasons against it, yet it need not be pronounced necessarily true. One thus declares the futility of a search for final or absolute truth. In ethics it may never be possible to determine that an action is absolutely right in the sense of being the best of all possible actions in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, there are many points in human experience at which certain actions are reasonably declared justified. Analogously, there are justified beliefs that may not be true in a timeless, absolute sense, much less infallible or incorrigible. The belief that the earth is flat is a case in point: a reasonable, though clearly not infallible, belief in its time, upon which a subsidiary set of beliefs was founded. It is less reasonable now, though, arguably, not wholly irresponsible.

Shifting the focus toward the intellectual "character" of knowers, Sosa proposes an epistemological theory of qualities or characters that can allow the "supervenience of epistemic justification on such non-epistemic facts as the totality of the subject's beliefs, his cognitive and experiential history, and as many other non-epistemic facts as seem relevant."¹⁰ This would be a theory analogous to deontological ethics. By basing judgment on facts about a knowledge claimant's character, it would allow justification to have sources that neither strict foundationalism nor coherentism can, *ex hypothesi*, acknowledge.

One further step, which precedes Sosa's move to "reliabilism," should be mentioned. Sosa draws attention to the plausibility of assuming that "beings with observational mechanisms radically unlike ours"¹¹ are capable, also, of having knowledge of their environment. Foundationalism, with its insistence upon basing knowledge in sensory experience formulable in propositions of natural language, must restrict the label "knowledge" to products of human cognitive endeavor. This restriction, he maintains, results in an unwarranted assumption of uniqueness for human cognition. Now although I am not especially concerned to be able to accommodate the possibility that extraterrestrial be-

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 20.

ings (Sosa’s example) have knowledge, I have no reason to assume that they cannot, if they exist. More interestingly, though, to take this point is to be able to accommodate within theory of knowledge the fact that other sentient beings with which we are familiar clearly do have knowledge of their environment.¹²

To summarize Sosa’s proposals, then, our knowledge cannot be founded, but a coherent body of knowledge still requires a quasi-foundational link with reality. Propositional orthodoxy is suspect, and the implicit, strict foundationalist assumptions that our (human) mode of knowing must have an infallible basis and that it is unique in meriting the designation “knowledge” are mistaken. An adequate theory of knowledge requires a fundamental principle, akin to a generalized version of the utility principle, with the capacity to apply across a multitude of situations and would-be knowers. Substantively, though, the principle would incline toward deontological emphasis. Perhaps, indeed, it would be more accurately construed as an amalgam of the best of these two approaches, consequentialist and deontologist, with somewhat greater weight accorded to the latter. Such a principle should not be tied (i.e. should not tie knowledge and justification *per se*) to a certain kind of sensory being with certain kinds of historical and spatial circumstances.

In a theory of knowledge reshaped in consideration of these points, the center of epistemic focus will become an intellectual analogue of the stable virtues and dispositions. Just as a person’s actions can, to a significant extent, be judged with reference to his/her moral reliability, so cognitive activity and its products might be able to be judged with reference to the epistemic reliability of would-be knowers. Implicit in this approach is a recognition of the extent to which knowledge-seeking situations and situations where claims to knowledge are assessed invoke questions about whom one is prepared to trust, and why. In an ethical position of this nature, primary justification attaches itself to moral virtues, to stable dispositions to act in certain ways.

¹² Consider, in this connection, Bradley’s dog, who “dichotomizes the world into the smelly and the nonsmelly, using as criterion ‘what is smells, and what does not smell is nothing’” (quoted from Bradley’s *Logic* by Dorothy Emmet in *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* [London: MacMillan, 1966], p. 26).

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Secondary justification accrues to particular acts because of their sources in virtue; though, as I shall explain, this connection is not simple, automatic, or direct.

For epistemology modeled on this paradigm, the onus will be upon the justification of particular beliefs or knowledge-claims of S at *t*, not upon justification in general or in the abstract. Evaluative significance will be accorded to S's intellectual disposition, which is discernably of a certain sort, in so far as it embraces certain intellectual virtues. This endeavor will, of necessity, appeal to social criteria of virtuous cognitive conduct. In other words, epistemological judgment is not just a matter of assessing individual conduct per se, but of assessing it as a manifestation of justifiable social practices and approaches to enquiry. It is crucial that individuals be recognized as social beings, as members of communities with all the obligations membership entails, as much in intellectual as in moral activity. For such an epistemology, I shall argue, epistemic responsibility is a central virtue from which other virtues radiate. This is analogous to the way in which, for hedonists, happiness is the central good, for Kant, good will is the only good in itself, from which all other goods derive.

Epistemological Precedents

The declaration that there is considerable communality of vocabulary in the languages of morals and epistemology is neither new nor surprising. One speaks alike of actions that it is "right" and "wrong" to do or that "ought" to be done, and of beliefs that it is "right" and "wrong" (on the basis of available evidence) to hold, of propositions that "ought" to be believed. It is "permissible" to conduct oneself in certain ways if the circumstances are appropriate, "permissible" to draw certain conclusions if the facts are appropriate. We attribute moral and intellectual integrity to people, declare them rational in action and in enquiry, condemn them as morally or intellectually careless.

Long familiarity with this close affinity between ethical and epistemic modes of discourse, amply evident in the literature,

may suggest that Sosa's proposal is not as novel as I maintain. It is instructive, therefore, to consider some examples from writings where this semantic overlap is evident to see whether it in fact indicates an underlying substantive affinity between the two fields of enquiry. What I shall present is only, of course, a small sampling to which many more examples could be added, but I think it is a representative one.

Consider *The Problem of Knowledge*. Here Ayer discusses knowing as "having the right to be sure."¹³ He writes of "being entitled" to talk about something being true,¹⁴ and of someone's "right to reproach me" if my epistemic credentials do not meet certain standards.¹⁵ But for Ayer, such affinities with ethics as the account may imply are purely semantic. There is no suggestion that epistemology be construed as a pursuit analogous to ethics, that the models of reasoning are similar. The rights and entitlements in question are wholly dependent upon standard empiricist criteria for making justified knowledge claims. There is no indication that theorists of knowledge might benefit from restructuring their pursuits to capitalize upon a substantive affinity with moral theory.

With Chisholm, the matter is somewhat different, and instructively so. He notes that epistemic reasoning and discourse are very much like ethical reasoning and discourse, that many characteristics philosophers "have thought peculiar to ethical statements also hold of epistemic statements."¹⁶ Later, connecting both ethical and epistemic statements with statements of feeling and emotion, he asserts that neither species of statement can be either true or false.¹⁷ This adumbrates a central strand in Chisholm's later philosophical position, according to which there are no first person propositions—only attributions of properties to oneself (hence, one would not assert "I see red" but rather "I am

¹³ A. J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1956), p. 31 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Roderick Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

appeared to redly").¹⁸ The connection with ethics here suggests that the same will be true in moral discourse.

In his *Midwest Studies V* paper, Chisholm, more or less in passing, draws attention to the way "presuppositions of the theory of evidence are analogous, in fundamental respects, to the presuppositions of ethics."¹⁹ He concludes the paper with the claim that, although understanding the concept "justify" in its ethical sense does not, in his view, help to clarify the distinction between "knowledge and true belief that is not knowledge," he means to "leave open the possibility that the epistemic sense of justification can be explicated in purely ethical terms."²⁰

These points are only partially relevant to my position. They are relevant in that they are about more than mere semantics, particularly in the latter work. They indicate that not only the discourse but also the presuppositions and reasoning involved in ethics and epistemology are markedly similar. This suggests, although Chisholm does not pursue it, that unearthing the explanatory possibilities inherent in the similarities might yield increased understanding both in ethics and in epistemology. It is not clear whether Chisholm sees the similarity as merely methodological or as also substantive. It is reasonable, though, to read him as allowing for either, or both.

Chisholm does not seem to find these similarities very important, however; or at least his position is ambivalent. In my view, by contrast, understanding the concept "justify" in its ethical sense may indeed help with the distinction between "knowledge and true belief that is not knowledge." At least, it may provide some new insights into just what is and is not important about the distinction. The distinction may, indeed, turn out to be philosophically useless. Developing the consequentialist approach sketched out above could quite conceivably show that whether one's true beliefs are or are not knowledge makes no significant

¹⁸ See Roderick Chisholm, *The First Person* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 93–95.

¹⁹ Roderick Chisholm, "A Version of Foundationalism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy V*, ed. P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, Jr., and H. K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 563.

difference as long as there are good reasons for considering them true, and none against. Philosophers are inclined to withhold the (honorific) designation "knowledge" when—unknown to the believer—a belief is true, but not justified according to standard epistemic procedures and principles. But a reconstruction of the argument on consequentialist lines could show that the difference, though factually interesting, is philosophically unimportant. Following a similar line of argument on a deontological model, a knowledge claim might well acquire increased credibility for S at *t* in view of its source in (epistemically) virtuous proceedings. Again, the distinction between knowledge and true belief that is not knowledge would acquire a diminished importance. (On such a line of reasoning, what can actually count as knowledge in a definitive sense will be very little indeed—most so-called knowledge is really well-warranted belief. But this is not a bad state of affairs, either in ethics or in epistemology. It is both realistic and challenging.)

Chisholm's concluding suggestion is that the question be kept open about whether the epistemic sense of justification can be explicated in purely ethical terms.²¹ Whereas the last suggestion did not allow enough, this suggestion concedes too much, for he shows what this might entail with the example of one's having the right to believe whatever one wants, provided no one else is affected. This would collapse epistemic justification into ethical justification in a way that is not particularly illuminating. It is, of course, true that in a wide variety of instances I may believe what I like or, more stringently, what works for me as long as it does not harm or adversely influence someone else. This point is almost purely a moral one. The more interesting question, to my mind, is whether I can structure my epistemology so that it is wrong *epistemically* for me to hold certain beliefs because my epistemic principles will not allow it. Chisholm's concession to moral discourse does not address this issue.

I hope that, so far, it is clear that this refocusing of epistemic emphasis is not to be understood as a proposal that epistemo-

²¹ Ibid., p. 563.

logical enquiry be regarded simply as a study in the ethics of belief.²² One sometimes has the impression that Chisholm resists developing an analogy between ethics and epistemology because he does not want epistemological questions to be construed simply as an additional species of ethical question. This impression is especially strong in his paper "Lewis' Ethics of Belief," where he reads Lewis' statements about beliefs that are justified or unjustified, right or wrong, as *ethical* statements expressing fundamental principles of Lewis' theory of knowledge.²³

It is one thing to assert, as Chisholm does elsewhere in the Lewis paper,²⁴ that we defend our beliefs and conclusions in ways very similar to those in which we defend our moral actions. It is significantly different to assert that our epistemic principles *are* moral principles *tout court*. Again, the difference is not merely semantic. It is perfectly reasonable to argue, as Firth, for example, does convincingly and conclusively, that epistemic concepts are not reducible to ethical concepts;²⁵ it is quite another matter to propose, as I am doing, that we structure our epistemological reasoning on an analogy with our moral reasoning. This does not amount to an insistence that we separate the moral from the epistemic uses of terms such as "right," "wrong," "good," "bad," "justified," "unjustified." The point is to understand the similarities and differences in the reasoning processes that warrant the application of these terms.

Chisholm takes Lewis' position to be that judging the quality or character of a belief is the ethical aspect of epistemology: that, for Lewis, no specific, epistemic sense needs to be read into "right" and "wrong" designations of beliefs. But I think that,

²² I develop this point more fully in the next chapter, showing the relation between my position and discussions about the ethics of belief.

²³ See Roderick Chisholm, "Lewis' Ethics of Belief," in *The Philosophy of C. I. Lewis*, ed. Paul Schilpp (La Salle, Illinois: Library of Living Philosophers, 1966), p. 232.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 225–26.

²⁵ See Roderick Firth, "Are Epistemic Concepts Reducible to Ethical Concepts?" in *Values and Morals*, ed. A. I. Goldman and J. Kim (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978). I am not persuaded that "reducible" is the appropriate word here, since its use implies that, if the answer were in the affirmative, epistemic terms would be diminished in import and/or status. There is thus something question-begging about it.

particularly in his paper "The Rational Imperatives,"²⁶ Lewis is writing not so much about the ethics of belief per se as about something very like what I advocate here: concentrating upon the illuminating aspects of the analogy that can be drawn between moral and epistemological reasoning.

In this paper, Lewis contrasts a manner of moral criticism that holds the doer responsible "only for the moral worth of his intentions and not for their cognitive validity as predictions"²⁷ with modes of criticism where the doer is held responsible for the cognitive validity of his moral intentions. This contrast suggests that he takes the two to be separate matters, if perhaps complementary. In this context, he refers to a "sense in which cognitive rightness is itself a moral concern, . . . in the broad sense of moral."²⁸ This is the sense I would prefer to call analogical, to indicate that the reasoning, too, is analogous to, but not identical with, moral reasoning; therefore, neither subsumes the other. Only when, at the end of the paper, Lewis considers whether it is ever right to believe without cognitive justification does he ask questions that belong properly to the ethics of belief context. Up to this point, he is investigating questions of objective rightness, cogency in reasoning, and cognitive validity as questions that do not obviously constitute merely a species of ethical question. This is what I am proposing: that we acknowledge and learn from the similarities between the two modes of enquiry without conflating them.

There are, in my reading of Sosa's writings and in the position I shall proceed to develop, some affinities with Peirce's theory of enquiry: for example, in the disaffection with strict foundationalism and the critical view taken of the Intellectualist Model of Justification, in the exhortation to concentrate upon practices, in the emphasis upon the importance of consequences, and in the implicit "fallibilist" sympathies. I accord a greater significance to the intellectual character of knowing subjects than Peirce does, though its importance is, arguably, implicit in his

²⁶ C. I. Lewis, "The Rational Imperatives," in *Values and Imperatives* (Stanford: The University of California Press, 1969).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

position. Unlike Peirce, I do not see scientific method to be the paradigmatic method of enquiry, nor am I convinced that all enquiry will ultimately approach the truth, the same and only truth. Peirce suggests such a goal for enquiry, for example, in his characterization of the activity of thought as an activity “by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a foreordained goal . . . [a] predestinate opinion . . . fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate. . . .”²⁹ And I would concede the validity of this as an ideal. Peirce observes that “logical self-control is a perfect mirror of ethical self-control”³⁰ (though I see them to be *analogous*), and his observation that “the purport of any concept is its conceived bearing upon our conduct”³¹ catches a central thread of my position.

Responsibilism

The question, then, is just what will be entailed in putting epistemic responsibility in a central place in theory of knowledge. Sosa writes of his “reliabilist” proposal, “In epistemology, there is reason to think that the most useful and illuminating notion of intellectual virtue will prove broader than our tradition would suggest and must give due weight not only to the subject and his intrinsic nature but also to his environment and to his epistemic community.”³² An elaboration of this notion of intellectual virtue, with a consideration of how the subject’s nature, environment, and epistemic community might be accorded epistemological significance, will provide a preliminary answer to the above question.

I call my position “responsibilism” in contradistinction to Sosa’s proposed “reliabilism,” at least when *human* knowledge is under

²⁹ In C. S. Peirce, “How To Make Our Ideas Clear,” in *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vol. V, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), para. 407.

³⁰ C. S. Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is,” *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, op. cit., p. 280, para. 419.

³¹ C. S. Peirce, “Issues of Pragmatism,” *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, op. cit., p. 312, para. 460.

³² Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” p. 23. Sosa elaborates this reliabilism more fully in his “Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue,” *The Monist* 68, No. 2 (April 1985).

discussion. I do so because the concept "responsibility" can allow emphasis upon the active nature of knowers/believers, whereas the concept "reliability" cannot.³³ In my view, a knower/believer has an important degree of choice with regard to modes of cognitive structuring, and is accountable for these choices; whereas a "reliable" knower could simply be an accurate, and relatively passive, recorder of experience. One speaks of a "reliable" computer, not a "responsible" one. A person can be judged responsible or irresponsible only if she/he is clearly regarded as an agent (in this case a cognitive agent) in the circumstances in question. An evaluation of human knowledge-seeking in terms of responsibility is instructive precisely because of the active, creative nature of that endeavor.

Virtue—and Intellectual Virtues

For Aristotle, the virtue of a human being lies in his/her particular excellence qua human being: virtue is "such a . . . state as makes a man good and able to perform his proper function well."³⁴ Virtue is a teleological conception in the sense that the possession and exercise of virtue tends to lead one, dependably, to the realization of certain ends. The exercise of specific virtues such as kindness or generosity produces and/or increases moral goodness in their possessor and may tend also to add to the well-being of his or her associates. In short, virtues are valuable qualities to their possessor, for to perform well seems, in general, to make one a happier and better person. Often, too, they are beneficial to others, for virtuous conduct is frequently directed toward other people and tends to be agreeable to them.

³³ I must admit, however, that "reliability" maintains a closer connection with truth and warrantability than responsibility can establish. I opt for "responsibilism" for the advantages cited, despite this clear disadvantage.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. E. C. Weldon (London: Macmillan, 1927), Book II, chapter 4. It is useful to return to Aristotle in giving an account of the virtues, for in many ways his work on the subject has not been superseded. Philippa Foot makes a similar point about the value of Aristotle's work in the title paper of *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978). My indebtedness to her discussion of virtues in that volume will be evident in the pages that follow. Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* makes a convincing case for the perennial relevance of an Aristotelian account of moral virtue. By extension, much of what he says is relevant to intellectual virtue.

According to Aristotle, a human being's "proper function" will be clear from a knowledge of human essence. Although I do not think there is an essential "humanness," I do think cognitive activity is so central to human life that any evaluation of human character must take the quality of this activity into account. By "cognitive activity" I mean perceiving, remembering, reasoning, knowing, believing, speaking, imagining, daydreaming; activities that have their source in experience of the world and of one-self as part of the world: in awareness and self-awareness. Cognitive activity is central to being human in that it is almost always occurring, perhaps even in sleep (probably, at least, in dreams). Furthermore, this activity is basic to everything one does, from performing habitual actions such as picking up a pen to sign one's name, to responding to other persons, to reasoning philosophically, to performing those actions of which moral judgments are made. It is not, however, the proper, essential function of a human being in the sense either that it is a unique function that human beings do not share with other sentient life or that a human being is only properly human when engaged in cognitive endeavor.

I do not insist upon the centrality of cognitive activity simply to imply that one might be deemed intellectually virtuous by dint of never making a mistake when signing one's name. To be intellectually virtuous is not just to have a good score in terms of cognitive endeavors that come out right. Intellectual virtue is more about possessing a fairly constant and dependable set of qualities and capacities, manifested in one's orientation toward the world, toward one's knowledge-seeking self, and toward other such selves as part of the world. I think this description is similar to what John McDowell, for example, has in mind when he maintains that concepts of particular virtues are used "to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behaviour."³⁵ Virtues, both moral and intellectual, have more to do

³⁵ In John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62 (1979): 333.

with ways of relating to the world than with the "content" of particular actions or knowledge claims.

Aristotle designates wisdom, intelligence, and prudence as the primary intellectual virtues.³⁶ This list is not exhaustive of all possible such virtues, but it is not as important here to draw up a catalog of virtues as it is to consider the role of virtue in epistemic life. I shall consider the appropriateness of these three virtues for the present context, but the extent to which the list is complete is not a matter of central concern.

Wisdom, for Aristotle, is the "*means or instrument of apprehending first principles*"³⁷ and knowing "the truth about these principles."³⁸ For him, this is the supreme intellectual virtue, at least when it is construed as general wisdom as opposed to particular excellence (e.g., for the performance of a specific art). Wisdom is most properly declared an attribute of a person in recognition of excellence in the speculative part of the soul; its domain is the contemplation of eternal scientific truths, of first principles, and of the inferences that can be drawn from them. It has nothing to do with discovery.

While I endorse the view that wisdom is an intellectual virtue of central importance, I reject both the doctrine of the division of the soul that gives rise to it in Aristotle and the view of science as a discipline whose objects are unchanging and eternal. As I understand it, wisdom has to do with knowing how best to go about substantiating beliefs and knowledge claims, where "best" does not mean "cleverly" or "skillfully" as much as "with intellectual honesty and due care." It entails having a good idea of the extent to which such efforts need to be extended before it is reasonable to claim knowledge or to hold beliefs. More importantly, to make the distinction from cleverness still plainer, wisdom involves knowing what cognitive ends are worth pursuing and understanding the value of seeing particular cognitive endeavors in context so as to achieve a just estimation of their significance. Nor is the province of wisdom appropriately restricted to

³⁶ Op. cit., Book I, chapter 13.

³⁷ Ibid., Book VI, chapter 6.

³⁸ Ibid., Book VI, chapter 7.

purely speculative activities. Wisdom is reasonably predicated of ratiocinative, experimental, creative, and constructive intellectual activities; indeed, of the whole range of human cognitive activity, though at certain everyday, commonsense levels it is probably not very appropriate to use so lofty a term. (At the other end of the scale, allowing wisdom to subsume intuitive reason, as Aristotle does, could have important implications for the latter. Despite the bad philosophical press that claims about intuitive reason so often evoke, we are much more likely to look upon them favorably and grant them credence when they are made by someone we have reason to consider wise.)

Wisdom and epistemic responsibility are so closely related that they are almost interchangeable. Clearly, a wise person will be epistemically responsible in most cases where the term is applicable, and an epistemically responsible person will strive for wisdom. Nevertheless, I prefer to see epistemic responsibility as the primary virtue for the following reasons: first, despite my rejection of the division of the soul that gives rise to wisdom's centrality for Aristotle, the term wisdom does, with its long tradition, carry a contemplative connotation that denies or minimizes the active nature of human cognitive life. Second, however one may stipulate its meaning, wisdom retains a good deal of the static quality it has for Aristotle: it is difficult to conceive of a wise man becoming unwise (as long as he is in possession of his faculties). Third, wisdom seems, as Aristotle suggests, to be a quality appropriate to a certain age; epistemic responsibility is not. We would be less likely to speak of a wise sixteen-year-old than of an epistemically responsible one. I thus prefer to see wisdom as the ultimate, possibly unattainable, goal toward which the epistemically responsible strive.

Intelligence is appropriately included among the intellectual virtues to the extent that it implies neither genetically endowed intellectual capacity nor, as it does for Aristotle, the "merely critical"³⁹ making of distinctions. Construed as the virtue operant in attempts to look at situations clearly and carefully, so as

³⁹Ibid., Book VI, chapter 2. When referring to genetically endowed intellectual capacity, Sosa's "reliabilism" is the more appropriate term to use.

not to be *unduly* swayed by affectivity, intelligence belongs among the intellectual virtues. I emphasize "unduly" because I do not think we are ever unmoved or unaffected by what impinges upon us cognitively, however slightly, nor that we should strive to be. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean⁴⁰ is apposite here.

It is apposite, too, where the virtue of prudence is concerned. Prudence, in my view of intellectual virtue, acquires a somewhat different construal from that entailed in Aristotle's divisions of the soul, with his separation of theoretical from practical wisdom. In Aristotle's view, prudence is, at most, called for when assessing the ends that knowledge can, responsibly, be made to serve. As I understand it, intellectual prudence is closely allied with wisdom and has considerable bearing upon judgments of epistemic responsibility. In other words, there is a sense in which prudence, as opposed to recklessness, is called for in epistemic as much as in ethical contexts. It involves judging which lines of enquiry it is prudent or imprudent to pursue, having a sense of one's limitations, and being able to see the impossible difficulties certain lines of enquiry might bring about: difficulties that, once raised, must be settled but that could be ignored without damage to the enquiry as such. Accurate judgment of the extent of one's own competence is primarily at stake here. This intellectual virtue is the one that, if pursued to excess, becomes intellectual timidity.

Prudence is elusive of elaboration because too much emphasis upon prudence leads not only to timidity but to a picture of epistemic life as essentially cautious and conservative, more concerned with avoidance of error than with creativity and exploration of new possibilities. There must be room, within the larger sphere where good knowers *live*, for the Socratic gadfly and for those who take outrageous stances to keep the epistemic community on its toes, to prevent it from settling into complacency or inertia. Nietzsche comes to mind in this regard, with his challenges both to moral and to epistemological patterns of thought, as does Feyerabend's challenge to the very notion of scientific methodology.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Book II, chapter 5.

Conceptually, it is problematic to accommodate this kind of thinker within a responsibility-based theory. No one is inclined to doubt their interest in *knowing well*; rather, the conceptual problem arises because such projects invite the paradoxical conclusion that it could sometimes be necessary to be epistemically *irresponsible*, at least in the eyes of the community, to be responsible.⁴¹ Epistemic rebellion, and seemingly outrageous thought experiments subversive of “received” discourse, cannot, therefore, simply be condemned as treacherous or dismissed as irrational by knowers who are responsibly and openly committed to making the best sense of the world (particularly if “best” can be aligned, to some extent, with “creativity” and “inventiveness”). Conceptual accommodation of such stances may be facilitated, if not fully accomplished, with reference to the MacIntyrean theory of exemplary *character* that I outline in chapter 2. It is in part because of Socrates’, Nietzsche’s, and Feyerabend’s established intellectual credibility that each, in his own way, is able to play a gadfly role, poking holes in the edifice of “established” knowledge so that other responsible thinkers *need to take notice*. Catalysts of cognitive change play as vital a role in communities of knowers as do conservers of established practice.

Aristotelian intellectual virtues thus redescribed perform very much the same function in cognitive activity that Sosa ascribes to intellectual virtue. He holds that to each human faculty there corresponds a distinctive set of accomplishments. The virtue of any faculty, then, is manifested in its reliability in attaining such accomplishments. An intellectual virtue is “a quality bound to maximize one’s surplus of truth over error”;⁴² it is “a subject-grounded ability to tell truth from error infallibly or at least re-

⁴¹ Constantine Boundas brought this paradox to my attention. In her (Wittgensteinian) exploration of the forms departures from *moral* tradition may take, Sabina Lovibond observes that “an essential characteristic of games is that their rules can at any time be modified, at the will of any or all of the players, with a view to making the game more enjoyable to play. Such changes may, moreover, be initiated by experimental behaviour on the part of an individual player who—like Paul Feyerabend’s ‘epistemological anarchist’ . . . ‘can assert anything he wants and often will assert absurd things in the hope that this will lead to new forms of life’” (quoted in Lovibond, *op. cit.*, p. 171).

⁴² Sosa, “Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue,” p. 227.

liably in a correlated field."⁴³ Wisdom, intelligence, and prudence undoubtedly count as qualities of this sort. Sosa considers intuitive reason, deductive reason, propositional memory, introspection, and perception as faculties whose exercise might provide cause for judging them virtuous. For this account, I prefer to think of virtues accruing to their possessor rather than to the faculties themselves, particularly for the purpose of deriving attributions of epistemic responsibility from an individual's general, cognitive conduct. Such attributions are more appropriately assigned to persons than to faculties.

Intellectual virtue is also a matter of orientation toward one's knowledge-seeking self. In other words, for the intellectually virtuous, self-knowledge is as important as, and indeed complementary to, knowledge of the world. To achieve it, one must, presumably, be good at introspection, and this capacity, like the other qualities mentioned, can be cultivated in oneself, even though there are crucial conscious and unconscious limitations upon the extent to which self-knowledge can be achieved and/or claimed, even through introspection.

In her discussion of virtue and the good life in *The Sovereignty of Good*⁴⁴ (with which I am, otherwise, in general sympathy), Iris Murdoch makes rather light of self-knowledge as a goal of the virtuous.⁴⁵ On this point I disagree with her. It is precisely because self tends to obtrude so insistently in all human activity, in all attempts to be "objective," that self-knowledge is crucial. One needs to know whether the concept of self, which is obtrusive, is in fact valid; and one must know oneself to achieve a just estimation of the extent to which one does know, believe justifiably, de-

⁴³ Ibid., p. 243.

⁴⁴ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). In this work, Murdoch maintains that love is a central concept in morality. This point may seem to be about moral virtue alone, and to have nothing to do with intellectual life, but I think this is by no means the case, nor does it seem to be for Murdoch. Love, construed as "unsentimental, detached, unselfish, objective attention . . . [the] intellectual ability to perceive what is true, which is automatically at the same time a suppression of self" (p. 66), is as consonant with a theory of intellectual virtue as it is with a theory of moral virtue. It is at the core of the concern to grant realism normative force, as I shall argue in chapter 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 67–68.

ceive oneself, or fail in epistemic responsibility. It is not clear, as Murdoch seems to believe, that self will obtrude more, and hence unduly, as a result of endeavors to achieve self-knowledge. I take her point that what passes for self-knowledge is often mere delusion, but given the communal nature of most cognitive activity, it is reasonable to suppose that one's self-perceptions are open to communal challenge and, hence, to revision and correction. Here, too, there are degrees of epistemic responsibility, even though, because of the impossibility of separating knower and known, the difficulties of assessment are great. None the less, despite the apparent circularity in such an undertaking, it is important to aim for self-knowledge in order to assess the degree of one's own responsibility, both epistemic and moral. One cannot improve upon it if one does not know it. Reflexivity is both a fact of human capacity and (potentially, at least) a value.⁴⁶

Virtuous Character

How, then, are we to delineate more precisely the nature of an intellectually virtuous character? I have maintained that intellectual virtue is, primarily, a matter of orientation toward the world and toward oneself as a knowledge-seeker in the world.⁴⁷ Pursuing this point a little further, it is helpful to think of intellectual goodness as having a realist orientation. It is only those who, in their knowing, strive to do justice to the *object*—to the *world* they want to know as well as possible—who can aspire to intellectual virtue. In this context (as in Gosse's case before his intellectual

⁴⁶In the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume LV*, 1981, K. V. Wilkes, in her "Response to C. Hookaway's 'Conscious Belief and Deliberation,'" writes that "... faults that permit us to hold ... unjustified beliefs are ... negligence, idleness, wishful thinking, cowardice, conformity, self-deception ... carelessness. ... Since it takes honesty, humility and hard work to apply the Socratic method and since we are free to be lazy or diligent in the matter, the activity in question is one to which notions like that of responsibility apply" (p. 100). Evidently, if one is to be responsible in this activity, one must try to know one's potential faults and strengths and to recognize when one is engaging responsibly in the activity and when one is not.

⁴⁷John McDowell (op. cit.), writing of moral virtue, thus observes: "A kind person has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behaviour" (pp. 331–32). Sensitivity is here construed as a sort of perceptual capacity. It is something of this nature that is at the basis of the orientation I am discussing, for intellectual as well as for moral virtue.

crisis), the term 'realism' itself is used with normative force.⁴⁸ Intellectually virtuous persons value knowing and understanding how things really are. They resist the temptation to live with partial explanations where fuller ones are attainable; they resist the temptation to live in fantasy or in a world of dream or illusion, considering it better to know, despite the tempting comfort and complacency a life of fantasy or illusion (or one well tinged with fantasy or illusion) can offer.

It is easier to believe that a favorite theory is true and to suppress nagging doubts than to pursue the implications of those doubts and risk having to modify the theory. It is also sometimes easier to believe that one cannot master a certain subject matter (i.e. to delude oneself into believing that it is too difficult) than to acknowledge the accessibility of the subject relative to an accurate assessment of one's capacities and to tackle it. The intellectually virtuous incline toward the latter course in either case, all else being equal.

For the intellectually virtuous, knowledge is good in itself, not just instrumentally good; though, as with all such seemingly categorical claims about virtue, this statement is more complex than it appears. One hesitates to attribute intellectual virtue to a voracious collector of facts, such as Sartre's self-taught man, or to an information gatherer of "encyclopedic" mind. The hesitation arises from an implicit belief that it is possible, theoretically at least, to know everything yet understand nothing. Evaluative capacities will be well cultivated in a virtuous character, whose mindfulness of the need to understand the significance of an endeavor, and to proceed accordingly, will be apparent.

Although I take virtues to be beneficial human qualities, it is not always clear whom they benefit. Historically, the answer would likely be different for moral and for intellectual virtues. The former probably, on balance, benefit others more than they benefit their possessor: at least a possessor who does not count upon rewards in heaven. They are difficult to achieve and maintain, and one might well have a happier, and quite probably an

⁴⁸This is the force it has, too, in the way Murdoch uses the term (see *op. cit.*, p. 64 ff., in particular), though this use is implicit throughout her book. I explore the implications of using "realism" normatively at greater length in chapter 6.

easier, life without them. In terms of self-respect, though—and its importance must not be underestimated—one is likely to be better off virtuous than vicious. From a social point of view, the virtuous (though not those excessively virtuous) are more likely to perform morally good actions, and in this respect, society clearly benefits.

Intellectual virtues however, as traditionally construed, would seem primarily to benefit their possessor. Often it seems of no importance to anyone else how epistemically responsible one is, whether one lives with hearsay information or with the products of genuine efforts to know, whether one suspends belief until it seems the only reasonable course, or whether one cares about what one knows. This impression arises from a mistaken judgment about the significance of these virtues, particularly about the practical, social applications of what an intellectually virtuous knower might claim to know; but historical reasons for this judgment are quite readily discernible. There is a long epistemological tradition for which knowledge-seeking is essentially individualistic, for which isolated and fairly simple, perception-based examples are taken as paradigms of knowledge, and for which only what has been discovered by an enquirer's independent efforts is considered worthy of being called knowledge. Such a view grants too little significance to human cognitive interdependence, to the fact that, in most of the more complex and interesting things one might claim to know, even within one's own field of expertise, one is dependent upon the cognitive authority of other, better informed, and/or differently specialized knowers whose intellectual virtue clearly *matters*.⁴⁹ One of the effects of broadening the notion of intellectual virtue and of making it of interest to epistemologists should be to align its public value more closely with its private value.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ I shall discuss the implications of this idea more fully in chapter 7.

⁵⁰ In Sosa's view, "It is of prudential interest to the subject himself to know how reliable and trustworthy his own judgements are in various categories. That is also moreover of prudential importance to his fellows and of social importance collectively to his epistemic kind. Testimony is of paramount importance to the *epistemic* weal and progress of any social, language using species" ("Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue," p. 241).

A Subject's Nature, Environment, Epistemic Community

In an account of virtue, either moral or intellectual, one must both acknowledge that the account is of an ideal, perhaps never fully realizable, and, at the same time, keep its requirements within the reach of ordinary human beings so that there can be many virtuous persons, if perhaps none perfectly virtuous.⁵¹ I have claimed that virtuous human beings strive to develop accomplishments that will enable them to perform their proper function well. My point is not, though, that this 'proper function' could be conceived as a kind of blueprint that every human being who would be virtuous must strive to fit. The possible forms of human goodness are infinite, the possible forms of epistemic goodness perhaps fewer but, nonetheless, manifold.

Clearly, there are factors in a person's nature, and in the environment and epistemic community where cognitive endeavors take place, that have crucial bearing upon the form intellectual virtue can take. It would be unreasonable to hold a color-blind person irresponsible for not learning to discern the difference between red and green or a dyslexic person irresponsible for not learning how to read a set of directions. Because of such deficient capacities, certain practical restrictions may need to be imposed upon a person's activities with regard to driving motor vehicles or dealing with toxic substances, but imposing such constraints is a different matter from declaring such persons epistemically irresponsible. They, too, are capable of intellectual virtue, though there are areas of experience in which they could not claim to be reliable. Again, it is not so much the specific content as the general orientation that counts.

Analogous considerations arise with regard to the environment and the epistemic community. It would be as ludicrous to declare a Soviet scientist irresponsible simply because she or he has not read all relevant, Western scientific treatises on a specific subject (that is, those banned in the Soviet Union) as it would to condemn an ancient Athenian for putting forward theories about heavenly bodies that were not based upon telescopic observa-

⁵¹ Jim MacAdam reminded me of this point.

tion. Constraints of this sort are rarely absolute: an exceedingly diligent scientist might succeed in obtaining the unavailable work, just as an exceptional scientist, finally, was the first to use the telescope. But criteria of responsibility cannot be so harsh as to require one to break too far out of the boundaries drawn around cognitive activity by the environment and by the condition of knowledge in an epistemic community, elastic though these boundaries may be.

The epistemic community does impose requirements of epistemic responsibility, however. Knowledge claimants whose claims merit respect will have taken pains to become familiar with the currently available information that pertains to the claims they wish to make. Pronouncements about biology, nuclear physics, politics, or economics by one who has not troubled to become familiar with the "state of the art" are often epistemically irresponsible. Considerations relating to the nature of the environment and the epistemic community by no means always excuse ignorance. Just as often, they impose conditions and requirements *sine qua non* for the acceptance or the attribution of epistemic responsibility. (The relevance of these points to Philip Gosse's situation is apparent.)

Clearly, too, certain roles and sets of circumstances impose standards of intellectual achievement over and above those expected of persons simply *as* persons. In consequence of the commitments he has made that led to his becoming a respected scientist and a Fellow of the Royal Society, Gosse has epistemic responsibilities that, in a certain sense, transcend those of "ordinary" members of an epistemic community. He thus faces demands of epistemic responsibility of a more pressing nature than those that face an "average" enquirer. He is one of those who shape the standards of responsible enquiry; thus, when he proves no longer able to continue shaping those standards, his case is especially difficult to judge, particularly in view of the apparent worthiness of his reasons. Teachers, clergy, physicians, and scientists, among others, in their professional capacity, face special epistemic demands. One might be reluctant, in fact, to judge as intellectually virtuous a teacher (or physician or scientist) who is epistemically responsible in professional matters but

is dogmatic, careless, and unscrupulous in private life.⁵² Expectations of integrity are closely connected with attributions of intellectual virtue, though here, again, the doctrine of the mean is relevant: too little value accorded to integrity clearly makes the attribution of virtue inappropriate; too rigid an insistence upon integrity may verge toward dogmatism.⁵³

Recommendations

The task, now, is to bring together this discussion of intellectual virtues and Sosa's discussion of foundationalist and coherentist epistemology to see what can be achieved by such a juxtaposition. Given the nature of intellectual virtue, it is immediately obvious that no theory of the subject will be able to provide either a solid alternative to traditional foundations or an alternative recipe for coherence to solve coherentist problems. Neither can a theory of intellectual virtue offer any easy calculus for assessing knowledge and belief claims nor provide a decision-making scale against which specific knowledge claims can be measured for validity. Indeed, it cannot provide any definite and final answers.

But there is much that such a theory can do toward increasing our understanding of human cognitive experience and promoting our efforts to know well. The theory works primarily through example, in two principal ways. First, although Aristotle can offer no rule of thumb for achieving virtue, no check list of actions one must perform in order automatically to emerge virtuous, he can and does show us a good deal about the manifestation of virtue in human life and about its place in a human community. We see how the conduct of the virtuous shapes both the conduct of those aspiring to it and conceptions of virtue itself. Through understanding these conceptions and seeing what is involved in such conduct (in the process of growing to moral

⁵² Note that this attitude is implicit in the fact that these people are among those considered to be appropriate guarantors in official transactions such as signing passport applications.

⁵³ In this connection, see G. Taylor's interesting paper, "Integrity," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55, Suppl. (1981). In his response to Taylor's paper in the same volume, R. Gaita draws attention to the delicate balancing process that is necessary if integrity is not to merge into dogmatism.

and intellectual maturity), one acquires ways of discerning when conduct and (analogously) claims to know are responsible, and when they are not. This ability develops even though one could not responsibly write a “guide for the recognition of responsible knowledge claims.” Indeed, it is often easier to recognize plainly irresponsible claims than it is to declare any one claim truly responsible. But this is quite a respectable way of arriving at greater precision in understanding. In working towards answers to his “What is x?” questions, Socrates proceeds very much in this same way, exploring what justice or piety could not be in order to show more clearly what they are. From reading the dialogues, one can understand something both about what is at issue and about how to direct one’s own conduct to approach the ideals under discussion.

Second, a responsibilist epistemology will not be able to provide direct solutions to many of the problems that have traditionally puzzled epistemologists. It cannot show us precisely why it is justifiable to assume that the next emerald we see will be green (and not “grue”) or why it is more reasonable to believe there is a chair in front of us when we have “chair-like” visual experiences than to suspect that we might be electronically stimulated brains in vats. Students often wonder, after studying Plato’s *Republic*, just how one could know from a consideration of two, apparently indistinguishable-in-kind actions by two different agents whether the agent in either case was acting from knowledge of the good or was merely (fortuitously) performing a good action. And there is no simple answer to the question. Similarly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to make pronouncements about the relative responsibility of two separate claims to know a “simple” empirical fact. Judgments about epistemic responsibility, like judgments about *dikaiosune* in Plato, are called forth by a wider context of cognitive activity. If, however, a person seemed to be accumulating a record of fairly consistent unreliability in simple perceptual situations, one would begin, at least, to wonder about his or her capacity to know responsibly, both in these and in more complex situations.

It emerges from this discussion of epistemic responsibility that

a viable epistemology must take adequate account of the extent to which cognitive activity is a communal process. From the very beginning of cognitive life, one of the most important tasks facing a would-be knower is to learn who is to be trusted, not only in matters traditionally construed as moral but, even more importantly and fundamentally, in matters of knowledge and belief. The wolf boy of Aveyron knows little, if anything, of what the "average" human being knows. His ignorance cannot be explained by saying that the world is not there for him to experience and know; nor can it adequately be explained by his not having human language. The most important fact in accounting for his ignorance is that he has had no access to a human community of knowers. I am not suggesting that he knows nothing: clearly he knows a good deal of what wolves know. I cite the example to illustrate the vital dependence of knowledge-seekers upon the epistemic community.

Readers no doubt will not hesitate to acknowledge the extent to which childhood learning is dependent upon nurture; but my claim is more wide ranging. Adults, too, even the most thoughtful and intellectually competent ones (even solitary researchers) are similarly dependent upon the testimony of others: on friends with tales to tell and information to convey, on newspaper reporters, newscasters, writers of scholarly works, tabulators of scientific findings, colleagues who claim to be informed, and on 'specialists' in all subjects, both esoteric and commonplace.⁵⁴ The dependence is by no means absolute. The discerning will always choose and consider before accepting any account, but we believe and claim to know far more than we will ever conceivably experience at first hand. The success of the entire cognitive enterprise is dependent upon something like an honorable and cooperative, if tacit, agreement between information purveyors

⁵⁴ John Hardwig discusses a superb example of such interdependence in his paper "Epistemic Dependence" (*Journal of Philosophy* 82, No. 7 [July 1985]). He reproduces the title page of a report on an experiment in physics on which ninety-nine 'authors' are listed and observes: "[N]o one person could have done the experiment . . . and many of the authors of an article like this will not even know how a given number in the article was arrived at" (p. 347). Yet the article stands as a report of "state of the art" knowledge.

and knowledge seekers. The participants in the agreement sometimes are in the giving role, sometimes the seekers. On both sides, though, epistemic responsibility is of the essence.

Broadening the concept and widening the epistemological scope of intellectual virtue does not dispense with the need to follow standard evidence- and justification-seeking procedures. As I have indicated, the fact that X, who is epistemically responsible, believes or claims to know that *p*, does not make *p* true. But if X has indeed shown herself to be epistemically responsible, it is reasonable to consider the claim seriously, even to accept it (provisionally, at least). If Y, who is notoriously irresponsible, were also to claim that *p*, it would be much less reasonable to take him at his word. To some degree, as such examples suggest, a broadened notion of intellectual virtue will impinge upon and, to an extent, even dictate the nature and reasonable scope of acceptable evidence- and justification-seeking procedures, while shifting focus to encompass the character of the seeker as well as the nature of the procedures themselves. This process is illustrated in my discussion of the Gosse case.

I have not been concerned specifically with questions about philosophy of science in this chapter, nor will I be in the rest of this book. It should be stated, though, that science is prey to the foundational difficulties faced by all attempts to establish knowledge claims, or systems of knowledge and/or belief. In some senses, science is a special, exceptional kind of knowledge to which my observations may seem not to apply. It seems to be reliable in itself, regardless of whose it is, and its reliability seems to be steadily increasing. (Here, Sosa's term, reliability, is the appropriate one.) This extraordinary reliability is a consequence, in part, of a peculiar and highly successful methodology that, in as impersonal a way as possible, dictates the nature of the process and so shapes the ensuing product.

Scientific knowledge does not stand wholly beyond the scope of this discussion though. Its foundations are by no means as absolute as they were long believed to be. The continuing success of the scientific enterprise depends, at the very least, upon responsible commitment on the part of the community of practitioners. Here, too, there is something like a tacit, basic agree-

ment. Part of the responsibility of this commitment entails an acceptance of the need constantly to scrutinize the method itself, as well as the procedures within it, even if this scrutiny should necessitate modifying the method or loosening the demands of its orthodoxy. Science is one sort of knowledge among many, albeit an important and distinctive sort. But it is not a paradigm for knowledge in general, such that only those methodologies modeled upon it merit philosophical respect.

Shifting the focus of epistemological enquiry to a study of intellectual virtue and epistemic responsibility will enhance the confidence that can be lent to knowledge claims, even when absolute certainty is taken to be impossible. In an oft-quoted passage in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle observes that “an educated person will expect accuracy in each subject only so far as the nature of the subject allows.”⁵⁵ Likewise, I am urging that, as theorists of knowledge, we need to be reasonable in our expectations so as not to impede genuine possibilities of insight by imposing unattainable goals. Epistemic responsibility is a stringent requirement but not an impossible one. Perfect certainty is more than we can hope to achieve.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, op. cit., Book I, chapter 2.

CHAPTER 4

The Ethics of Belief

The Ethical and the Epistemic

In the discussion of Chisholm and Lewis in chapter 3, I stated that, in shifting the focus of enquiry into human knowledge, I do not mean to propose that epistemology is best construed, now, as a study in the ethics of belief. Much of the argument so far has been directed toward showing the closeness of the analogy between epistemic and ethical ways of thinking, and it is important to make clear just why the two should not be completely conflated.

This task—demonstrating that these domains of enquiry must remain separate while, at the same time, benefiting from their evident overlap—is complex. The complexity arises because knowing well, preserving an appropriate degree of objectivity, thinking clearly, and being epistemically responsible are, in fact, moral matters. But they are not *just* moral matters; nor can they, as moral matters, be wholly subsumed under standard modes of ethical discussion. Despite the analogy I argue for (in chapter 3) between epistemological and ethical reasoning, they are not amenable to adequate discussion under the rubric of any of the traditional approaches to ethics nor under any reasonable amalgam thereof.

In chapter 1, I cited the example of a drug being put on the market despite inadequate knowledge about its effect. Some might argue, in view of the gravity of the consequences in this case, that culpability here is purely moral and that epistemic cul-

pability is merely derivative. I do not think this is the right way to look at it, however. Clearly, the action itself is culpable: no one could quarrel with that. But the action is possible only because of a complex set of prior epistemic moves, not all of which have been carried out responsibly. The most one can say in such instances, then, is that epistemic and moral considerations are so interwoven that they cannot be absolutely separated. None the less, principles of responsible enquiry have evidently been violated, quite apart from the moral consequences to which they give rise. To present a drug as safe for public consumption amounts to declaring it safe—a strong knowledge claim, insufficiently substantiated.

Moral questions, then, have a central epistemic core that is commonly, but mistakenly, taken to be of a piece with the concerns submitted to moral scrutiny. This confusion tends to obscure a complexity that must be acknowledged. Standard approaches to ethical questions generally proceed from the tacit assumption that all moral agents perceive and understand situations in precisely the same way. The agents differ only in how they act in response to these perceptions. There is little reason, however, outside the confines of an exaggeratedly narrow, empiricist view of cognition, to assume such commonality. Human intellects and sensibilities are not blank, mass-produced (and hence identical) screens upon which situations simply register in exactly the same way. Different cognitive capacities and epistemic circumstances create situations where experience is structured, and hence the world is known, quite differently from one cognitive agent to another. Each time a moral judgment is made, then, two parts of a situation must be assessed: the way it is apprehended and the action that is performed as a result.¹ The former, the apprehension, is a matter for epistemological assessment, and the moral dimension of the situation is crucially dependent upon this epistemic component.

At the same time, intellectual activity is morally important in its own right and must be assessed on its own terms. This state-

¹Lawrence Blum argues on lines similar to this in chapter 6, "Altruism, Emotion, Reason and Perception," in his book, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), especially p. 133.

ment is related to my claim in chapter 1 that *knowing well* is essential to the achievement of human well-being, hence cognitive activity *should be* performed as responsibly as possible.

To show how these responsibility requirements might be fulfilled, I have started with the fact that knowledge is achieved out of practices in which knowers engage. When one considers how such practices can be evaluated qualitatively, questions arise that are very like the questions discussions of moral virtue are designed to answer. But because cognitive practices are not conflatable with moral practices, different sets of concerns need to be addressed. In particular, it is apparent that there is a process of assent integral to cognitive practice, which is partially connected with the will. In other words, such practices always open the possibility that truth will emerge, and the intellect cannot but assent to it. This matter seems, at first glance, to be a purely epistemic one. But the intriguing cases are those where an agent works to block that process of assent, perhaps for moral, prudential, or other more purely practical reasons. The need to believe in the value of a task or a project or the need to survive a difficult situation may justify redirecting a practice. Such justification could not count as *epistemic* justification, though; rather, one would say that prudential, practical, or moral considerations override epistemic ones, that the former are judged more pressing, or that there are times when, paradoxically, it may be most prudent to be irrational.² Despite the centrality of knowing well to human well-being, then, it must be acknowledged that epistemic claims are not absolute, nor are epistemic duties sternly uncompromising. All else being equal, it is better to know, but often, in human experience, all else is not equal. These moral and epistemic concerns, then, are not perfectly distinct or distinguishable from one another.

In large measure because of its pervasiveness in human lives, cognition is of quite a different order from those moral matters that are, more specifically, the subject of ethical deliberation: respecting persons, promoting human welfare, not telling lies. It is

²This may be the way to describe the examples from Meiland's article that I discuss in section 2 of this chapter. These examples are illuminatingly explored by John Heil in his "Believing What One Ought," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983).

not that the latter are merely matters of whim, only occasionally urgent, and it is quite often all right to show disrespect both for truth and for persons. But there are situations and occasions where these requirements simply are not pertinent: where one is faced with no need to make moral decisions. Knowing well and seeing accurately, by contrast, are constant demands that permeate all, or almost all, aspects of our lives. They might even be taken to be intrinsically, and not just instrumentally, good: part of what it is for human beings to use their powers and capacities most fully. Human beings care about knowing well in so fundamental yet so implicit a fashion that its value is, paradoxically, often imperceptible. Because it is so crucial a value, responsibility of a special nature attaches to it; consequently, it may seem that epistemology is simply a branch of ethics. But this is not strictly so. In this account of epistemic responsibility, I hope to provide a missing part of a radically incomplete picture. Standard justification- and evidence-producing procedures constitute another, equally important aspect of that picture, but these latter procedures are not amenable to subsumption under the terms of moral reasoning.

Because the relation between epistemic and ethical questions is so close and so complex, an important step toward achieving conceptual clarity in discussions of responsibility, both moral *and* epistemic, is to understand the extent to which these contexts can indeed be treated as separate. In the “ethics of belief” literature, ethical and epistemic considerations are, in fact, often conflated (at least where ethical ones are not permitted wholly to subsume epistemic ones). I shall, in section 2 of this chapter, examine some instances of this kind of approach a little more closely. My purpose is twofold: I want both to show why the present study is not part of that general line of thought and to show why problems properly designated as problems in the “ethics of belief” can not be taken as paradigm instances of the relation between epistemic and ethical modes of reasoning for this re-focused approach to epistemology. It is worth repeating, though, that while my purpose in this chapter is to make a case for separating “ethics of belief” discussions from discussions of intellectual virtue and epistemic responsibility, the separation will not be

absolute, nor is it desirable that it should be. Sufficiently different problems are central to each context to warrant holding the two apart for purposes of explication. It is like parting the strands of a thread to show that it is not a unity, but composed of individual filaments that alone could not make up a thread.³

To illustrate what is involved here, consider an example where ethical and epistemic considerations are not separated but where, I think, they should be. I have in mind W. K. Clifford's case of the owner of an unseaworthy ship. This shipowner convinced himself that the ship was, in fact, seaworthy—he selected, emphasized, and ignored evidence until he could honestly claim to *believe* in its seaworthiness. He then sent the ship to sea as an emigrant ship and collected the insurance when it went down. Clifford maintains, and it is easy to agree with him, that the shipowner “*had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him.*”⁴ Here, epistemic and ethical considerations are tightly entangled. Indeed, given the loss of life involved, it might initially seem reasonable to claim, on consequentialist grounds alone, that the situation calls for a purely moral pronouncement.

Clifford goes on to argue that the shipowner would, in fact, have been blameworthy even if the ship had arrived safely, claiming that “the question of right and wrong has to do with the origin of his belief, not the matter of it.”⁵ The shipowner had no basis for believing the evidence he chose to believe, whatever the outcome of his actions based upon it. This argument seems to be a move in the direction of separating the epistemic and the ethical strands of the situation so that each can be evaluated on its own terms. It would then be possible to judge the epistemic aspects on their own merits, separated from their ethical implications. But, in fact, Clifford believes himself to be making a strictly

³The process I have in mind is rather like untwisting the fibers of Wittgenstein's thread, where concepts are extended by twisting fiber upon fiber, yet their strength “does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through the whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres” (see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968], § 67).

⁴W. K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief,” in *Lectures and Essays*, Vol. II (London: MacMillan, 1879), p. 178.

⁵*Ibid.*

moral judgment here, thus glossing over the extent to which prior, unwarranted epistemic moves *produce* the condemnable action. This probably occurs because the magnitude of the moral wrong in the actual case is such that it is easy to allow its moral import to eclipse its underlying epistemic significance.

But there are two kinds of judgment required here. If the two lines of reasoning are not recognized as separate (or at least separable) in such instances, we are in danger of failing to allow a place in our thinking for purely epistemic considerations and attributions of responsibility. It may well be that epistemic demands are more stringent when much is at stake, illustrating the impossibility of effecting an *absolute* separation between the epistemic and moral strands of the thread. Here however, although there is a direct causal connection between epistemic and moral culpability, they do not collapse into one, single, culpable action. The knowledge claim at the basis of the declaration of seaworthiness is inadequately substantiated. The shipowner is open to censure not merely because of his action, but also because of his method of arriving at the belief upon which it is based. The former is, primarily, moral censure, the latter, primarily epistemic. These judgments are interdependent in that the shipowner is morally blameworthy largely because he has been epistemically irresponsible. He is epistemically blameworthy because he has distorted evidence, rationalized, and deceived himself in order to arrive at conclusions upon which he has acted irresponsibly. But the irresponsibility attaches primarily to the epistemic maneuvers. Had his knowing been responsible, it is possible that his action might have been different. If one can accept that he did, indeed, succeed in convincing himself of the ship's seaworthiness, then it is the epistemic moves supporting that conclusion that must be faulted: the incontinent believing "in the teeth of the evidence," to appeal again to Heil's useful characterization.⁶ The judgments of responsibility attach to wrongs that cannot be considered either equatable or conflatable without glossing over the complexities of the situation.

The (potential) independence of these two kinds of judgment,

⁶cf. John Heil, "Doxastic Incontinence."

despite their evident reciprocal influence, will be clearer from a consideration of instances in which one kind of judgment could reasonably be made without entailing the other kind. It is possible to be morally in the wrong even when one has been rigorously scrupulous in one's epistemic endeavors. This state of affairs is clearly evident in cases of blackmail and intrigue, where considerable efforts, of the most epistemically painstaking kind, are expended to know the truth about a certain set of circumstances, whereupon the truth is used in a morally unscrupulous manner. One might argue here that the question of epistemic responsibility does not arise, or is irrelevant when the agent is so clearly a moral scoundrel, but it *does* arise and can be centrally relevant. For instance, if we can fault the agent's epistemic efforts, we are in a position to accuse him or her of slander. Such cases point, then, to one possibility of being epistemically responsible and morally irresponsible with respect to the same circumstances. Knowledge responsibly achieved has the potential to be put into practice in reprehensible, irresponsible ways. Such an agent's practical concerns depend upon a certain set of epistemic moves for their realization, and these moves can be evaluated from a purely epistemic point of view. But *moral* censure accrues to the practices in the service of which such knowledge is pursued, and such censure is appropriate quite independently of the epistemic warrant that supports these knowledge claims.

By contrast, the existence of the "Flat Earth Society" may seem, *prima facie*, to be morally harmless to its members and to its nonmembers. Coherent sense of most significant aspects of experience can be achieved within the context of the claim that the earth is flat, and aspects that do not fit can be rationalized into place. It is perfectly conceivable that members of this society might be as morally upright (in the traditional sense) as any of our most demanding standards could require. Yet they would be judged epistemically irresponsible, for, on the basis of insufficient, contradictory evidence, they are claiming knowledge or belief that requires constant rationalization to maintain it; they are not taking available evidence sufficiently into account. Our epistemic convictions make us hesitate to respect instances of avowed knowledge or belief that require sustenance by so per-

sistent a rationalization program. This hesitation has moral implications of a subtle nature. We may very likely regard X as an unreliable source of information on other matters if we know that she holds such beliefs. The importance of this consequence must not be minimized. Much of epistemic life is concerned with determining the credibility of others and with establishing and maintaining one's own credibility. A belief in the flatness of the earth is thus both a moral and an epistemic (doxastic) matter that has significant bearing upon questions of moral, as well as intellectual, character. More specifically, with respect to the "public" side of these implications, it would pose problems both moral and epistemic if a flat-earthier were found among those in a position to grant or withhold funds for space research.

In their "private" dimension, the implications are somewhat different but equally subtle and worthy of consideration. I have suggested that a virtuous intellectual character manifests itself in an attitude toward the world, and oneself as part of the world, marked by sensitivity to the normative demands of realism. To be convinced of the genuineness of such an attitude in a putative knower who was persistently prepared to claim knowledge or belief in the face of flagrantly contradictory evidence, thereby subverting these normative demands, would be difficult. One might not be ready to make a character judgment on the basis of one such aberration; and one might be prepared to judge differently in light of overriding moral considerations (such as those I shall discuss in the next section). But a sustained effort to rationalize a belief so fundamentally constitutive of a world view that is incompatible with "state of the art" knowledge does, at least, raise serious questions about the worthiness of a person's epistemic character.

Knowledge claims have tangled repercussions both for their claimant and for those to whom they are uttered. A complacent acceptance of my own (perhaps careless, perhaps self-deceptive) conviction that I know about a political situation simply because I have allowed myself to be swayed by the charisma of a certain politician will have both epistemic and moral consequences. It will be difficult for me to proceed further on any line of enquiry that could yield responsible conclusions about the nature and

implications of that situation. My reliability as a contributor to other people's knowledge will likewise be damaged; for repeated behavior of this sort is likely to make others wary of respecting my claims to epistemic authority. The contrast between the case of the blackmailer and the flat-earthier points to the conclusion that it is always worthwhile to know well, though the moral import of cognitive activity may vary from case to case and require separate assessment.

In this sense, Clifford's analysis of the shipowner example is oversimplified in that it does not begin to deal with the varieties of possible interplay between epistemic and ethical considerations. One might, for instance, argue that epistemic irresponsibility is only culpable when it forms a basis for immoral intentions and actions.⁷ Thus, if the shipowner had simply kept the vessel moored where he could look at it and wander about it from time to time—perhaps with a certain fondness for it—all the while telling anyone who might ask that it was a wonderful old vessel and, despite its age, quite seaworthy, one might simply regard him as deluded and let it go at that. Here too, his affirmation is irresponsible on epistemic terms, though of little consequence—at least, of minimal moral import. The stance might, nonetheless, lead us to regard some of his other pronouncements with reservations, his credibility would thus be weakened. This consequence is epistemically significant, with moral overtones in its capacity to affect others as well as the owner himself.⁸ Moreover, if these pronouncements are taken as expressions of beliefs rather than as mere sentiments, then they are connected with possibilities of action, and he is to be viewed as a potential danger.

⁷I owe this point to a comment by Wayne Grennan on an earlier paper on this topic, which I read to the Canadian Philosophical Association in Halifax, June, 1981.

⁸Considerations of this sort seem to be at the basis of Sissela Bok's main argument in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), where she attempts to demonstrate the dangers of even the smallest step onto the slippery slope of falsehood and deception, even in the form of "white lies." I do not take truth-telling to be so absolute a duty; moral and prudential concerns can clearly override it. My stance does not detract, however, from the epistemological point that one has to know the truth in order to decide whether or not to tell it.

The Ethics of Belief

I began to explicate an ideal of intellectual character in my elaboration of the Gosse example and of MacIntyre's discussion of *character* in chapter 2, in terms of "responsibilism" and in a preliminary discussion of intellectual virtue in chapter 3. This ideal is one for which intellectual virtues have a content of their own. Precisely because they can be autonomously characterized and cannot be subsumed under "nonintellectual" moral virtues such as kindness, generosity, or truthfulness, they can figure independently in assessments of human character. Intellectual enquiry is in no sense value neutral.

But this point is complicated by the implications of one of the presuppositions of this enquiry, which I acknowledge in chapter 1. There I declare the Kantian concept of the creative synthesis of the imagination to be one of the most important innovations in the history of philosophy. In consequence of this innovation, it is possible to account for the *creative* nature of human cognition: a taking and structuring of experience, not a passive receiving and recording. Within the constraints imposed upon this creativity by the nature of the world and of human cognitive capacity, the subjective possibilities of making sense of experience are many and varied. There is a considerable degree of freedom in knowledge; hence, an adequate explication of human knowledge must give scope and grant respectability to subjective factors that structure the process of knowledge acquisition, while preserving an ideal of objectivity, of realism normatively construed. If the entire project is not to amount to an endorsement of an "anything goes" kind of relativism, there must be constraints upon subjectivity in the form of epistemic imperatives and criteria of epistemic competence. If these cannot be separated from moral imperatives of the standard sort, the balance between subjectivity and objectivity cannot readily be maintained.

I do not mean to say that maintaining this balance would be difficult because moral imperatives are open to subjectivistic formulation and interpretation (and justifiably so). My point is, rather, that if epistemic responsibility cannot be separated from moral responsibility, at least for purposes of explication, it be-

comes difficult to spell out constraints upon knowledge claims. Yet constraints are required to arbitrate between acceptance of a person's declarations of knowledge out of (moral) respect for the sincerity of his or her fervent but wholly subjectivistic *commitment* to a belief, and acceptance for the sake of preserving an ideal of objectivity.⁹ When alternative ways of making sense of experience are allowed, we require some standard of value to guide our efforts toward reasonable choices of experts and authorities.¹⁰

For reasons such as these, more traditional "ethics of belief" cases are not particularly helpful in designating the demands of epistemic responsibility.¹¹ In these cases, the ideal of objectivity works quite differently. Indeed, at times the most fitting and justifiable move seems to be something best called a "teleological suspension of the epistemic," for the kinds of personal and interpersonal situations used as examples to illustrate problems in "ethics of belief" are often such that the attitude taken to them can change the nature of the facts. This fluctuating "reality" is clearly less amenable to maintenance of an ideal of objectivity.

In such cases, moral considerations often, justifiably, outweigh epistemic ones, and C. I. Lewis's question, "Is it ever justified to allow oneself incogent belief in order to reinforce the affective inducement of some otherwise desirable mode of action?"¹² can reasonably be answered in the affirmative. To take a fairly straightforward example, someone diagnosed as incurably ill surely has the right to believe, contrary to all the evidence, that

⁹One of the problems with Sartre's well-known doctrine of *engagement* is that it does not allow for such arbitrating constraints.

¹⁰Here I refer back to Gosse and forward to the practical implications of this theory, which I shall discuss in chapter 9.

¹¹In this connection I must distinguish my position from that of Hilary Kornblith, as it is elaborated in "Justified Belief and Epistemically Responsible Action," *Philosophical Review* 92 (January, 1983). Kornblith characterizes epistemic responsibility in a manner compatible with mine in many respects, especially in terms of whether an agent "has done all that he should to bring it about that he have true beliefs" (p. 34). His position differs from mine in several ways though. Most important for this chapter is the claim, with which I disagree, that "questions of justification are . . . questions about the ethics of belief." Kornblith does not, evidently, intend to restrict the scope of discussion to the *traditional* ethics of belief context. However, I do not think "questions of justification" lend themselves to such univocal *identification* with questions about the ethics of belief.

¹²C. I. Lewis, "The Rational Imperatives," in *Values and Imperatives*, p. 176.

he or she will recover: a belief that would, on Lewis's terms, be incogent. Indeed, in some cases there are reasons to suppose that a belief of this sort has, in fact, contributed to a quite unexpected recovery. In view of this overriding good, an attribution of irresponsibility would be difficult to justify, even though epistemic imperatives are flouted. In such contexts, Lewis's question arises most urgently. Here, the usual direction of reasoning—from epistemic to ethical (from what I know to what I do)—is reversed, for ethical considerations are permitted to create epistemic constraints, urging and endorsing particular modes of belief and/or disbelief. In making a character judgment, one would have to allow that moral concerns can sometimes count as reasons for refraining from condemnation on purely intellectual grounds. Sometimes the strands are too tightly intertwined to be separable.

William James's defence of a moral right to believe a proposition in the absence of adequate, or indeed of any, epistemic justification is another case in point. Importantly, this defence takes place within a discussion where our responsibilities as knowers are taken to be very serious. Referring to our duty in matters of opinion, James insists, "*We must know the truth and we must avoid error*,—these are our first and greatest commandments as would-be knowers."¹³ Nonetheless, he allows that "our non-intellectual nature"¹⁴ can sometimes be both an inevitable and a perfectly lawful determining factor in our choice of beliefs. Indeed, he states that there are areas in which we must make a choice of, and a commitment to, a certain kind of belief even though we can never know that our belief is true: we must think and act "as if." This argument applies quite straightforwardly to his view of religious belief, where he maintains we are forced to declare ourselves on one side or the other. If our "non-intellectual natures" are such as to make religion the most pressing option, then it is best (morally) to assent to a religious credo rather than to hold back, sceptically, just in case it might not be true. For instance, although I cannot know whether my belief in the exis-

¹³William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Essays on Faith and Morals* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1967), p. 48 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 42.

tence of God can ever be *epistemically* justified (because of its lack of amenability to empirical confirmation), I can know a good deal about the moral consequences for me of holding such a belief. For James, these considerations clearly override the epistemic uncertainty. In this context at least, it is easy to agree with him that we have "the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will,"¹⁵ and to allow that moral concerns can override epistemic ones.

There is, in addition, an entire range of instances where acting "as if" can, in fact, bring about the desired state of affairs; where "*faith in a fact can help create the fact*," to use James's formulation.¹⁶ If I choose to believe that you like me and behave toward you on the assumption that you do, my acting in this way may quite possibly be instrumental in bringing about precisely the kind of liking I believe exists. Again, in view of the good this attitude produces, it is not reasonable to accuse me of having violated James's epistemic commandment. Here, acting "as if" is a species of heuristic principle. It has evident affinities with simply pretending something to be so in order to see what such a pretence might achieve. It is much more than this, though, for it is a psychological fact that, if one just pretends something to be so, rather than making oneself believe it, the whole thing is unlikely to work. Justification, here, is partially pragmatic, but it is not the sort of situation in which one would rightfully condemn a believer as epistemically irresponsible, given that cordial relations with you are something I *justifiably* perceive to be a good thing: a further epistemic requirement in the situation.

In a similar vein, Jack Meiland cites the cases¹⁷ of a businessman who has ample evidence that a partner is cheating and of a wife who has ample evidence that her husband is unfaithful. Both choose not to believe the evidence; indeed, they choose to believe precisely the opposite and to act upon this counter-evidential belief. This choice is made for the sake of sustaining relationships valued more highly than the redress of the particu-

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 56 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ In Jack Meiland, "What Ought We to Believe? or The Ethics of Belief Revisited," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (January, 1980).

lar wrongs in question. Both succeed in sustaining their relationships. From Meiland's point of view, these beliefs or disbeliefs are *morally* justifiable in view of the greater good they promote, and the believers are morally responsible, even though one could not declare them epistemically justified. The examples show what I mean by saying that this process might be called a "teleological suspension of the epistemic": epistemic imperatives yield to ethical ones. The epistemic irresponsibility an absolutist would discern pales before a more vital moral good. Those aware of the choices are not led to mistrust the reliability of these people on a more general level, since they wear their heart on their sleeve and do not mislead others.

I am assuming, for purposes of this discussion, that the reasons for wanting to promote or sustain the relationships in these cases are morally acceptable. Obviously, I might set about to acquire your goodwill and friendship for manipulative or other morally reprehensible purposes, in which case the judgments required by the situations would be quite different. Analogous motives could prompt both the wife and the businessman, with equally different judgmental consequences. Furthermore, my point is not that it is perfectly acceptable to construe interpersonal situations in any way one wishes; there are just and unjust ways of construing them, right and wrong ways, and ways that are more or less sensitive to the reality of the situation.¹⁸ Realism does not lose its normative force; it simply has a subtly different mode of interplay with moral demands. Given the way faith in facts can, in such contexts, effect changes in the particular "reality" because of concentration upon both the potential and the actual nature of the situation, demands for just, realistic perception and apprehension are especially strong.

Still, the point seems to be that evidence about the behavior and character of other persons is significantly different, epistemically, from evidence, for example, about the moons of Jupiter. A different juxtaposition of ethical and epistemic criteria is appropriate in evaluating each kind of case. Yet this does not conflate epistemic and moral criteria, nor does it imply that

¹⁸This is the kind of sensitivity John McDowell discusses in "Virtue and Reason."

similar epistemic contortions are in order where historical, geographical, or scientific knowledge and/or beliefs are at stake. Neither does it warrant the conclusion that epistemic considerations, in the quest for knowledge in general, can always (or even usually) be overridden by moral considerations of this nature.

Interpersonal situations do, however, impose epistemic demands of a somewhat different nature. For example, I must be responsible in my claims about knowing a person if I am to be instrumental in granting that person certain role responsibilities: if I am to recommend him or her to employers, entrust him with certain kinds of information, or consult her on certain matters of policy. The sense of "know" has shifted somewhat here, but it is connected closely enough to the sense at work in the instances I have been discussing to merit mention alongside them. In these cases, it would be much less reasonable to avoid accepting evidence (e.g., of a person's indiscretion) *as* evidence. At the same time, it would be quite unreasonable to go about understanding other people in a manner indistinguishable from the kind of activity involved in scientific enquiry. Any understanding gained by such approaches is more likely to be illusory than genuine, and perhaps harmfully so. (Behavioristic psychology might be viewed as a case in point.)

Lewis's question is whether it can ever be *epistemically* responsible to avoid or to shirk evidence. My answer is that, in personal relationships and in what James calls "truths dependent on our personal action,"¹⁹ it sometimes can; in more "detached" or objective contexts, it cannot. I do not mean that avoiding evidence is all right as long as one does not *care* about the matter at hand. Responsible knowers do care about what they can know, cannot know, or want to know. Rather I mean that personal relations and problems concerning religious beliefs raise epistemically and morally different questions from other situations, although it would be difficult to draw a firm boundary between these kinds of knowing. (Anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology fall, interestingly, on both sides of the line.)

From the point of view of philosophical methodology, how-

¹⁹Op. cit.

ever, it would be incorrect to adduce examples from interpersonal situations as paradigms to establish the theoretical point that ethical and epistemic judgment are one and the same. Such examples are atypical for knowledge in general, therefore they serve as poor paradigms. In different examples (the flat-earther and the blackmailer suggest suitable kinds), ethical and epistemic considerations appear to be distinct or, at least, distinguishable from one another. It is important not to allow the choice of example to determine, in advance, the outcome of enquiry. A discussion of how knowledge seekers are to proceed responsibly requires examples that are sufficiently context neutral to make purely epistemological points across a wide variety of cognitive situations. The proliferation of interpersonal examples in the "ethics of belief" literature seems to account, in large measure, for its difficulty in specifying a mode of attributing responsibility that is primarily epistemic. In spite of this problem, I cannot accept epistemology's traditional insistence upon examples wholly abstracted and isolated from context as laudable. For something to be context neutral, it is not necessary that it be entirely context-less: hence my discussion of the Gosse case and of MacIntyre's view of character in chapter 2.

Belief and Choice

Belief, knowledge, and understanding are, nonetheless, matters of choice to a significant extent. For the reasons I have just discussed, however, it is not appropriate to take the "ethics of belief" context to be the one that best illustrates and supports this point. Hence I want to concentrate initially, in this section, upon an elaboration of Michael Stocker's argument for choice and responsibility with respect to beliefs.²⁰ Stocker makes a good, convincing case for his conclusion that "if we can be responsible and active for various sorts of interesting and important physical acts, we can be responsible for mental goings-on, including beliefs."²¹ By "interesting and important physical acts," he means

²⁰ In "Responsibility Especially for Beliefs," *Mind* 91, No. 363 (July, 1982). I am indebted to this article for much of what I say in this section.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

acts more complex, and hence more problematic, than those standardly chosen as examples to show that there is freedom and choice in action. Physical acts such as holding one's breath or raising one's arm are commonly cited as examples in such contexts. They are then used to demonstrate that belief, because it is so unlike action (that is, of *this* sort), cannot involve choice and hence cannot be something for which we can be held responsible.

Such examples are as problematic in the way they tend to structure the outcome of enquiry as are those "ethics of belief" examples I have just been discussing, though with somewhat different consequences. Obviously, we *can* perform these actions quite readily, at will. When we contrast them with something like willfully insisting that today is Thursday when it is really Friday, we are led to conclude that, although there is choice in action, questions of choice do not arise with respect to knowledge or belief. The obvious conclusion is that we must know ineluctably that it is Friday simply because it *is*: there cannot be a choice. So the notion that there could be choice where knowledge and belief are concerned looks ludicrous.

When ethics of belief examples are taken as paradigmatic for the explanation of freedom in knowledge and belief in general, this suggests the conclusion that everything is a matter of choice: one can construct reality to suit one's purposes and passions. On the other hand, the kind of over-simplified paradigm that Stocker criticizes points to the opposite conclusion: that we are wholly passive with regard to our beliefs, hence no attribution of responsibility is warranted. The truth lies somewhere between these two points of view. This midposition is illustrated by examples of things people can choose to do: to stop being overweight, to be an informed opponent of apartheid, to stop being an alcoholic, to be a good driver. The results are reasonably described as *voluntary* outcomes of voluntarily embarked upon courses of action. They are things one can be ordered to do and that one can approach diligently or otherwise.

One major problem with discussions of belief that deny its active nature is in their concentration upon simple, hence misleading, end states as paradigms. They gloss over information gath-

ering and other such procedures that lead to belief formation²² and fail to consider acts such as those involved in paying attention, in calculation, and judgment. No one would deny that people are responsible for these and other activities that commonly lead to, contribute to, or accompany belief. If belief is part of, or the outcome of, any or all of these activities, it seems indefensible to deny that one can be held responsible for it. To limit the domain of responsibility to the activities performed in the acquisition of belief, while denying that an ensuing belief falls within this domain, is an arbitrary and unwarranted move, rather like holding Luther responsible for the thought processes that led to the formulation of his theses but not for the theses themselves.

At issue here is a cluster of problems concerning the extent to which human beings are appropriately seen to be active, or more properly considered passive, in their physical and mental being. It would be a mistake to contrast belief with physical action on the assumption that the latter is wholly free. This would ignore the ways in which physical action is impeded and dictated by the nature both of human agents and of reality. The contrast is taken to demonstrate that belief cannot be the achievement of a believer's doxastic *activity because* it is impeded by the nature of reality. Believers, therefore, must be passive. The truth seems to be that freedom, both in action and in belief, is constrained to some degree, but that this does not render it nonexistent nor trivial.

In Bernard Williams' paper, "Deciding to Believe," there is an example that underestimates the variety of ways in which people are rightfully regarded as active and responsible in believing.²³ Williams cites the example of a man trying to believe that his son is alive, in the face of evidence pointing to the great likelihood that he is in fact dead, in order to demonstrate the near impossibility of genuinely *deciding* to believe, unless perhaps by means

²² I have benefited in my thinking about this matter from John Heil's discussion in his "Doxastic Agency," *Philosophical Studies* 43 (1983).

²³ In Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

of self-deception. Now clearly, if the man's son is in fact dead and he has every reason to believe this to be so—or, at least, overriding reasons to believe it—he can only believe the contrary by deceiving himself. This is an interpersonal situation quite unlike those cited in the ethics of belief context, though no less problematic. Here, faith in a fact cannot help create the fact. So Williams is right, *for cases of this sort*, to be sceptical, to insist, as he does, that “if in full consciousness I could will to acquire a ‘belief’ irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I could seriously think of it as a belief, i.e., as something purporting to represent reality.”²⁴ It is also unlikely that I could seriously think of it as a belief after the event.

This kind of self-deception serves no better to illustrate the point that belief *can* be a matter of choice, *or* that it cannot, than do the examples from ethics of belief literature. Self-deception is a large and difficult area in the philosophy of mind and epistemology that lies beyond the scope of the present discussion.²⁵ Suffice it to say, though, with regard to Williams' example and those like it, that to introduce them as illustrations of believing at will begs the question, since the belief cannot, by definition, be true in such instances. Such beliefs may be prudentially, pragmatically, even morally justified, but the fact that they are known or strongly believed to be false from the outset precludes the possibility of their being *epistemically* justifiable. Here again, epistemic criteria are suspended. But the question at issue is somewhat different from the question about whether decision, choice, and responsibility can reasonably apply to the acquisition and assessment of knowledge and/or belief. What Stocker has in mind, by contrast, is more straightforward and more in keeping with our everyday activities as cognitive agents where we can reasonably be declared active and responsible for various intellectual activities, including the procedures we choose to follow in acquiring beliefs.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁵ See my “Bonne foi, mauvaise foi, sincérité et espoir” (written with John King-Farlow), in *Dialogue* 12, No. 3 (September, 1973), for a somewhat fuller account of my position on self-deception. (Pages 506 to 513 are my contribution to the article, as is the translation into French.)

Objections to such a view often suggest that questions about responsibility simply do not arise with reference to belief. Belief, it is argued, is much more like a condition than an act; hence, it is not at all reasonable to attribute responsibility with respect to it. Even if this objection were true—that is, even if belief *were* best construed as a condition—it would not be rendered immune to assessment in terms of responsibility. Conditions are as amenable to evaluation in terms of responsibility as are actions. This is not true of all conditions—clearly I am not responsible for being alive or for being the age I am—but there are conditions for which I, just as clearly, am and have been active and responsible—for being a philosopher, for being a parent, for being bilingual. Stocker is right, then, in insisting that “the notion of activity important here is allied to responsibility and contrasted with passivity,” and in stating that “showing that we can be active and responsible for beliefs and other mental goings-on in no way requires showing that they involve actions, much less bodily actions.”²⁶ This view does require that knowledge and belief be regarded as the products of active taking and structuring of experience. Impressions made upon an inert *tabula rasa* could not be amenable to such a discussion.

Two further objections to questions about choice and responsibility with regard to belief must be faced.²⁷ First, it might be argued that, if the aim of a project of enquiry is to arrive at certain previously specified beliefs, then the outcome of this enquiry must be foreseen from the outset. If this is true—that is, if we can foresee what we will believe at the end of the enquiry—then the enquiry itself seems to be pointless. If an enquiry aims to uncover reasons for what we strongly suspect we might come to believe, there is then no question of choice at the end of the enquiry about whether we will assent to the results uncovered. They are simply *there*, to be recorded and acknowledged and accepted as true.

But the objection does not carry. Consider, for instance, the flat-earthier mentioned in the first section of this chapter. Sup-

²⁶Op. cit., p. 401.

²⁷These, too, are examples Stocker considers.

pose that a long-time member of the Flat Earth Society, troubled by critics on all sides, wants to find out whether their objections have something to recommend them. Carefully, he or she reviews the relevant parts of the history of science where evidence for the roundness of the earth is presented, looks at photographs taken from satellites, and weighs the evidence against his or her long-standing convictions. Neither at the beginning nor at the end of the investigation is there conclusive evidence pointing to how the enquiry will come out. It is just as possible that our flat-earthier will choose to reaffirm the original belief concerning the shape of the earth as it is that he or she will choose to abandon it in favor of the “received” view. The flat-earthier might well choose to interpret the evidence as he or she had been doing before the investigation—affirm that the earth is flat and be held responsible for this choice.

Any bona fide investigation will have features in common with this example. Clearly, there must be some sort of project at the outset if an investigation is to occur. Sometimes, as in the quest for the location of Troy, there is a considerable degree of foresight, which the investigation sets out to confirm. Indeed, without the foresight, the expedition would not have been mounted, and Troy would not have been found. The point is not that archaeologists knew all along that Troy was there. If they had known, the search would have had no point, they could not have been held responsible for the declaration that they had found Troy, and the subsequent quarrels that took place would have been just so much empty quibbling. Searching and creativity may both, as Stocker suggests, be “hostile to foresight.”²⁸ It is not necessary, however, to conclude that cognitive and creative agents are reasonably held responsible for their products only when there plainly has been foresight. The truer picture is that of a product (belief, discovery, created work) emerging from an amalgam of foresight and serendipitous accident. For this product one can certainly be held responsible. Michelangelo’s *David* is such a mixture: foresight dictated by the flaw in the marble,

²⁸Op. cit., p. 403.

creative genius accounting for what was done with that piece of marble, a product for which he is undoubtedly responsible.²⁹

More important for my purposes here is a second objection concerning the relation between belief and foresight. This argument states that, however responsible and active we may be with regard to our intellectual projects, we cannot foresee what belief will ensue at their completion. We must therefore recognize our passivity where belief is concerned. We will simply see the results and accept their implications, much as a computer records information. But such an objection trades upon an unduly restricted sense of foresight. Stocker proposes a useful way of broadening the scope of foresight by introducing a distinction between *act* foresight (seeing what pushing the button of the water fountain or flipping the light switch will accomplish) and *character* foresight (possessing and using certain skills). The latter is closely connected “with practical knowledge and skill and thus [with] intellectual or practical character.”³⁰ There are evident affinities between this point and my central purpose in this essay. A human cognitive agent is regarded as active and responsible qua skilled person using his or her intelligence and ability even though the results of the enquiry may, in the end, come as a surprise,³¹ and there may be no question about choosing whether or not to assent to what has thus, responsibly, been uncovered.

Simple examples may make it seem necessary to be able to

²⁹ It might be argued that the attribution of responsibility is not quite so straightforward a matter in this creative context. If we recognize, though, that searches are often pointed in a general direction rather than *at* a specific, pre-defined goal—that they involve “feeling one’s way”—then it can more readily be allowed that questions of responsibility are appropriately raised about how well one is able, tenaciously and successfully, to follow a thread to some worthy end. Failures could then be seen partly as failures of responsibility and not as brought about by lack of talent alone.

³⁰ Op. cit., p. 404.

³¹ It would be a mistake, though, to hold, as Hilary Kornblith does, that once a certain level of character foresight has been acquired, then “more reliable belief acquisition will occur in one *automatically*” (op. cit., p. 38, my emphasis). This suggestion implies that there comes a point at which circumspection can come to a halt and natural processes simply be allowed to take over. Sometimes this transition may occur; but it would be foolish to take it for granted and simply to count on it. There is no reason to assume that responsible proceedings will produce static, permanently reliable capacities.

foresee the result if one can really be said to choose: I know what will happen if I raise my arm. I cannot know, though, what the outcome will be of my efforts to find out who really was responsible for a particular state of affairs (as in investigative reporting or judicial enquiry), nor how difficult or how morally as well as epistemically demanding it may be for me to accept the outcome. The latter example is sufficiently complex to make the point; the former is not.

The goal of this exercise is not to demonstrate that we can always choose when, or what, to believe. The point at issue is that we can sometimes choose; but often, there is no choice. It is cold, it is Monday, the paper is white: these facts force themselves upon me, I cannot choose that they be otherwise. Acknowledging our passivity is as important as recognizing when choice is involved. "Noting our passivity helps remind us that beliefs are about the world and their truth determined by it, not by us: that the fit is of belief to the world, not the world to belief,"³² as Stocker rightly points out. That there is sometimes or indeed often no choice, however, does not suggest that there is never any choice, activity, or responsibility in deciding what to believe. "[A]ctivity and responsibility are compatible with an important amount of passivity, of not being in total control."³³ The degree of choice is, as I have said, limited by the nature of the world and of our cognitive capacities.

Epistemic responsibility and culpability are matters of degree, as are other forms of culpability, both moral and legal. In a neutral context, where the "ethics of belief" considerations mentioned previously are not relevant, the highest degree of epistemic irresponsibility attaches to acts that lead to unwarranted and unjustifiable beliefs. I have in mind people who are wont to believe things for which the evidence is scanty or who systematically dwell upon evidence that supports a proposition, avoiding exposure to evidence that might put it in doubt. This self-deceptive procedure seems to be quite plainly irresponsible, even though there may be circumstances that mitigate the degree of censure appropriate.

³² *Op. cit.*, p. 408.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

Negligence cases are culpable, too, but somewhat differently. Here it is more a matter of carelessness, of failing to take the steps necessary to become aware of the evidence. The intellectual flaw here is the vice of *akrasia*:³⁴ less culpable in that there is no outright intention to be irresponsible, but more culpable in its repercussions for the assessment of intellectual character as a whole. To pursue knowledge in this way is wholly antithetical to the development of an exemplary intellectual character.³⁵

An ambiguous area, where it is not clear whether epistemic irresponsibility can be attributed at all, is seen in those cases where one cannot be faulted for having acquired a belief without the available evidence since one is, for some reason, incapable of becoming aware of the evidence. Mr. Magoo provides a case in point.³⁶ It is impossible to censure him for his ignorance of the dangers around him, despite his assurances to all who can hear that the situation is perfectly safe. Nevertheless, it would be irresponsible on someone else's part to take him at his word.

To be able to exercise choice in undertaking courses of action that lead us to certain beliefs is not tantamount to being able to change the world into what we might want it to be. This assumption is what vitiates Williams' example of the father wanting his son to be alive. This case cannot help us come to a decision about whether there is choice, and responsibility, involved in belief. Exercising choice as a doxastic agent cannot be equated with "saying makes it so," the stuff of fairy tales and science fiction. Choice involves actively seeking to discover how things really are

³⁴ I am thinking here of some of the meanings of *akrasia* Amélie Rorty distinguishes in her "Akratic Believers." Particularly apposite is her "descriptive akrasia," of which she writes: "It is easy to fall into pre-fabricated patterns of speech, self-deceptively thinking that such lapses don't matter. Often such lapses are social: a person engaged in conversation can fall into a way of talking that he disapproves" (op. cit., p. 178).

³⁵ C. S. Peirce (who is evidently convinced there is responsibility and choice in these matters) characterizes such a person thus: "The person who confesses that there is such a thing as truth, which is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it should, on full consideration, carry us to the point we aim at and not astray, and then, though convinced of this, dares not know the truth and seeks to avoid it, is in a sorry state of mind indeed" (in "The Fixation of Belief," in *The Collected Works of C. S. Peirce*, Vol. V, p. 387). Clearly, for Peirce, the exercise of responsible choice in these matters demands doxastic self-control, the antithesis of *akrasia*.

³⁶ This is Ernest Sosa's example in "How Do You Know?"

and knowing when it is responsible to declare them so. The freedom involved is neither absolute nor insignificant.

Implications

There is a minimal level at which it is easy to allow that there is choice, and hence responsibility, for cognitive activity. I am thinking of situations where even the weakest of cognitive imperatives rules out accepting a suspected falsehood. Examples abound in political propaganda and advertising where truth claims are deliberately slanted or fallacious. That one is urged to be circumspect with regard to such material plainly suggests that there are choices to be made about how one will proceed in making judgments of character and in accepting evidence at face value, and about when the most rational course is to reserve judgment. Much the same are those cases where one says, "She should have known . . ." either that a certain piece of information was meant to be kept confidential, that a friend was liable to be hurt by a certain sort of remark (these examples having to do with the interpersonal context), that it was not safe to drive on that particular evening, or that it was important to attend that meeting. For the broader, public domain, comments come to mind such as claims that Germans "ought to have known" what was happening to the Jews during the Nazi era, just as Canadians "ought to have known" about the treatment of the Japanese in Canada during the Second World War. In all these cases, the assumption is that there was a choice, that a person could have made the effort to be informed, that it was epistemically irresponsible not to have done so.

Where understanding is concerned, the direction of questioning shifts somewhat. Plainly, we cannot choose to understand. We can choose to *try* to understand and can set about doing so either responsibly or irresponsibly (for example, consulting "easy," popular accounts rather than more demanding, reliable ones). We can also choose the point at which it is proper to claim, both to others and to ourselves, that we do understand the subject under discussion, at least well enough to claim the right to be heard on it. Finally, we can choose when to bring our investiga-

tions to a close. We tacitly acknowledge many of these considerations when we deplore the excuse of having "to save face."³⁷

Willed belief, at the other end of the spectrum, is certainly more difficult. From a position of disbelief in God (to refer, again, to James), it would seem to be impractical, if not a conceptual impossibility, to decide to believe and, by an act of will, to do so. It is not so difficult to set about systematically to achieve this outcome given, at the outset, the *will* to believe; it is unlikely, though, that one could achieve it as a purely detached, intellectual exercise.³⁸ This project is the sort in which one's heart must want a condition of belief in God, to paraphrase James,³⁹ for the project to succeed at all. In this way, belief in God is very like Meiland's examples cited above, where it is necessary for various reasons to *believe in* someone (though a subtly different sense of "believe in" is involved here) and where one proceeds slowly to achieve just that.

Similarly, the success of certain medical or psychiatric treatments may well depend upon the extent to which the patient can believe in their effectiveness. Often one does succeed in believing and is active and responsible in doing so, just as when people convince themselves they can cope with flying or winter driving and act accordingly. Again, there is a slight shift in the meaning of "belief" here, but this term, like "knowledge", has a family of perfectly legitimate meanings. Behavior modification is often

³⁷ Peirce raises an important question in this connection. He asks (op. cit., vol. V, para. 238) whether we have an intuitive power of distinguishing between the subjective and objective elements of different kinds of cognition. In my view, this power need not be intuitive. If we have no such power at all, however, questions of epistemic responsibility are meaningless. Hence my position is predicated upon the assumption that reflexivity is characteristic of human cognitive capacity, that it is something that can be cultivated, and that there is a *cognitive* imperative to do so. I shall discuss this issue more fully in chapter 7.

³⁸ Hence Amélie Rorty observes: "While one cannot choose straightway to believe, to decide to come to a certain conclusion, one can place oneself in a situation where, predictably, one will accept judgments that one had merely used provisionally, or expressed out of some form of sociability, following a charismatic authority. We cannot directly control our expectations; but knowing our tendencies to detach judgments from their contexts, we can avoid accepting views just for the sake of the argument, when it seems clear that doing so will lead to accepting them *tout court*, despite general principles against forming and acquiring beliefs and judgments in this way" (op. cit., p. 179).

³⁹ Op. cit., p. 54.

construed as a process that gets rid of certain beliefs, fears, and so on. It can just as well, and perhaps more felicitously, be construed as a process that instills certain desired beliefs. As such it is (or at least it must be if we are to attribute responsibility with respect to it) a process one engages in by choice, for whose results one can be held responsible.

Traditional objections to extending these conclusions into the realm of “more objective facts” arise, in part, from the assumption that enough of a difference exists between *believing in* and *believing that* to make criteria that are applicable to the former inapplicable to the latter. It is this objection in its most categorical form that I address in the preceding section. It finds its classic expression in James’s assertion that “in our dealings with objective nature we obviously are recorders, not makers, of the truth; and decisions for the mere sake of deciding promptly and getting on to the next business would be wholly out of place. Throughout the breadth of physical nature facts are what they are quite independently of us, and seldom is there any such hurry about them that the risks of being duped by a premature theory need be faced.”⁴⁰ By taking exception to this interpretation of the subjective-objective relationship, it is not my intention to deny that “facts are what they are . . . independently of us”; particularly if this statement means that the world has a certain nature that it is our central, cognitive purpose to discover and understand. The part to which I take exception is the “recorder—model” of human cognition. In my view, we are discoverers rather than recorders of how things are. Out of this discovery, out of “raw” materials that are not subject to our will, we derive the information that forms the basis of our knowledge, belief, and understanding. It is our responsibility to perform this task with respect for how things are.

C. I. Lewis puts it this way: “Concern for consistency in supposition and belief, for validity in inference, and for cogent determination of beliefs according to the weight of the evidence is not avoidable for the animal that thinks deliberately.”⁴¹ This

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴¹ Lewis, op. cit., p. 174.

statement captures the core of what is involved in epistemic responsibility. If Lewis is making an analytic claim with the phrase "is not avoidable," his statement is problematic, for there would, in that case, be no choices involved and attribution of responsibility would be pointless. I read it, however, as a normative claim with a suppressed hypothetical. Either he is saying that these concerns cannot be ignored by those who would be epistemically responsible, or he is saying that they cannot be ignored if a person wants to be morally good. Given the context of the assertion (within a discussion of rational imperatives), I read it in the former way, recognizing in it an affinity with the Socratic injunction that one must know in order to act well. In some sense, ethical responsibility is founded upon epistemic responsibility, even if it is not identifiable with it. One who has not been scrupulous in knowing cannot be scrupulous in doing.

II

Cognitive Activity

CHAPTER 5

The Knowing Subject

Theoretical Basis

In the discussion of *Father and Son* in chapter 2, I maintained that sound psychological insights are a *sine qua non* basis for any theory that purports to explicate human knowing. In this chapter, I shall elaborate the picture of the knowing subject in which this theory of epistemic responsibility is rooted. This picture is broadly Kantian in outline and orientation, though crucial limitations in the Kantian view will be emphasized and alternative modes of understanding proposed.

The Kantian characterization of knowledge as the product of a *creative synthesis of the imagination* places the epistemological subject at the center of the cognitive process. This characterization is wholly revolutionary in the history of epistemology. For all its revolutionary character, however, the concept of the creative synthesis falls short of providing an adequate context to explain how individual human knowers, as organic creatures, create the products we call knowledge. Kant's recognition of the organic nature of human beings constitutes a richer approach than does the quantitatively based (Cartesian/Lockean), mechanistic model, but it is too poor in its failure to take into account the affective, cultural, and historical aspects of human life.

Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology, with its acknowledged roots in and avowed allegiance to Kantian philosophy,¹ goes further

¹Piaget declares his own position to be "close to the spirit of Kantianism"

toward recognizing the importance of *persons as knowing subjects*. For this reason, Piaget's theory offers a route toward a fuller understanding of the epistemological significance of knowers as persons, while retaining and building upon the best of Kant's insights.

In urging the relevance of Piagetian cognitive psychology to epistemology, I distinguish my position from views such as Frege's and Popper's. For these theorists, largely because of their respective positions concerning the autonomy of the known, a knower is an incidental moment in the emergence of knowledge.² For Piaget, by contrast, knowledge evolves out of a process of cognitive structuring—a cooperative interaction of practical and intellectual activity, of will, feeling, thought, and perception—through which knowers make sense of their experience. Piaget does not imply that a separate epistemology is required for each knower; indeed, there is no reason, in even a cursory view of human history, to suppose that individual cognitive activity is so idiosyncratic. But a study of the nature and role of individual cognitive agents as selves and as members of knowing communities promises to offer a more adequate understanding of the conditions that make knowledge possible than is achievable in attempts to formulate pure, formal principles of knowledge, as Kant does. The project retains a contact with human epistemic life that is lost, as well, in other more formal epistemological projects, such as the project of understanding a Fregean world of *Gedanken* in isolation from the thinkers of the thoughts, or a Popperian World Three in isolation from the creativity of knowing subjects.

in Jean Piaget, *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, trans. Wolfe Mays (New York: Meridian Books, 1971), p. 57.

²I also want to dissociate my position from Richard Rorty's stance, where he claims: "Only the assumption that one day the various taxonomies put together by, for example, Chomsky, Piaget, Levi-Strauss, Marx, and Freud will all flow together and spell out one great Universal Language of Nature . . . would suggest that cognitive psychology had epistemological import" (in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979], p. 249). He, then, argues that such a suggestion is seriously misguided; but to grant the importance of psychology to epistemology need not, I am convinced, necessitate the prediction of such a grandiose confluence.

It is persons who know—not abstracted, isolated intellects, understandings, imaginations, or faculties of reason. Hence, three hitherto often neglected aspects of cognitive activity constitutive of modes of knowing merit epistemological investigation. These are, first, the *Erlebnis*,³ or experience out of which it emerges; second, the personal history of the individual, preserved in memory and activated as the *Erlebnis* is imaginatively interpreted in the creative synthesis; and third, a mixture of communal, historical, and cultural factors, acquired through interaction and communication. Particular capacities and inclinations are neither incidental nor transitory. They form an integral part of a human being's nature as an actively knowing organism and are evident in his or her ensuing knowledge.

Outstanding instances of individual contributions to the growth of knowledge are tacitly acknowledged in references to Euclidean geometry, Newtonian physics, and Darwinian theory: specific thinkers, in specific cognitive circumstances, contribute to and shape public knowledge. Particularly with respect to matters such as starting points, choice of examples, and notation, there is no more evidence to suggest that others would have contributed in precisely the same way than there is to suggest that cognition is wholly idiosyncratic from knower to knower.

Kant cum Piaget: Steps Toward the Personal

Two passages from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are particularly relevant for my purposes here. First is Kant's assertion that knowledge in general is the product of a creative or reproductive synthesis of the imagination, that "we must assume a pure transcendental synthesis of imagination as conditioning the very possibility of all experience. For experience as such necessarily presupposes the reproducibility of appearances."⁴ Second is his denial that

³I use the word *Erlebnis* here since it is more precise in this context than 'experience'. In so doing, I am following a suggestion made by G. D. Kaufman, in *Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). With its root in *Leben* (to live), the word carries the connotation of something actively lived through, which is how I want to characterize human cognitive experience.

⁴Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), A 101.

... an object of experience or its image [is] ever adequate to the empirical concept; for this latter always stands in immediate relation to the schema of imagination, as a rule for the determination of our intuition in accordance with some specific universal concept. The concept "dog" signifies a rule according to which my imagination can delineate the figure of a four-footed animal in a general manner, without limitation to any single determinate figure such as experience, or any possible image that I can represent *in concreto*, actually presents.⁵

In calling the synthesis of the imagination *creative*, Kant opens the way for an explanation both of knowledge seeking and knowledge-as-product as inevitably bearing the mark of the knower or would-be knower. Knowledge, in this view, is a mode of dealing with experienced and experienceable reality, forged by the experiencer. It is neither passively received nor of an eternal, immutable reality. Again, to call it a *synthesis* is to emphasize the activity of knowers in making knowledge and in putting it together out of unarticulated or unorganized experience. To call it a synthesis of the *imagination* is less fortuitous, for it suggests that only a part—the intellectual part—of a knower is engaged in the activity, and this cannot be so.

"Imagination" is Kant's term for the image-forming faculty of the human mind. Use of the term does not imply that knowledge can be equated or confused with fantasy. The capacity to form and retain images makes memory possible; and it is in recognizing connections between sensory experiences and images retained in memory that one constructs concepts that constitute the basis of knowledge. Imagination is thus a mediating power or faculty between understanding and sensibility. It is the bearer of the schemata for the production of images that delimit a category, and permit its application to experience. I emphasize the active nature of this process by using terms such as "to form images," "to construct concepts," "mediating," "production," and "application." The knowing process is, above all, active in its creativity.⁶ This active view of knowledge can ultimately be ex-

⁵ Ibid., B 180, A 141.

⁶ Here, though, it is worth drawing attention to Richard Rorty's apt criticism of the Kantian epistemological enterprise. Rorty points out that "Kant was never troubled by the question of how we could have apodictic knowledge of [our] constituting activities, for Cartesian privileged access was supposed to take care of

tended to include practical as well as intellectual knowledge-seeking activity and, hence, one can derive not only a valuable insight but also a more broadly useful one from Kant's theory of knowledge.

The extension of Kantian theory to practical activity is important, for Piaget demonstrates convincingly that human beings acquire knowledge of a world of objects in consequence of *activity*, which is at first purely sensory-motor, later more of an admixture of the intellectual and the practical. This activity consists in discriminating or selecting from the environment certain groups of elements that are isolated and held together in a constructed unity. Discrimination and selection are possible precisely because of the development of what Piaget calls "cognitive structures,"⁷ which are, functionally at least, similar to Kantian categories.

It is worth explaining the nature and importance of this functional similarity. Unlike Kant, I do not think there is an *a priori* element in knowledge; but I do not reject the *a priori* in favor of something resembling a *tabula rasa* view of human cognitive capacity. One of Piaget's most important achievements is his demonstration that a rejection of a priorism, and, indeed, of all forms of innatism, is quite compatible with a recognition of human beings as organisms (that is, *not* as pure imagination or pure reason), structured in certain ways—by their very nature—prior to experience. The manner of this structuring determines,

that" (op. cit., pp. 137–38). There seems, in the Kantian scheme, to be no way of validating the claims made as a result of the creative synthesis. An acknowledgment and explication of the essentially *interpersonal* aspects of epistemic life, such as I undertake in chapter 7, begins to deal with this problem.

⁷Piaget uses the term 'structures' to refer, roughly, to accumulated experience in the form of schemes that influence the apprehension of reality. There is, in all organic life, a tendency to integrate structures into a composite system. On the physiological level, fish possess various structures that allow functioning in water—gills, a particular circulatory system, and a temperature mechanism—all coordinated into an efficient system. Analogously, a young child has separate behavioral structures such as looking at objects and grasping them. Initially, these two activities are not combined, but after a period of development, an infant organizes these two separate structures into a higher order structure, which enables her to grasp something at the same time she looks at it. There is no equivocation, for Piaget, in speaking of structure as existing from the outset and as structuring itself. The process is quasi-dialectical in its reciprocal nature.

within broad limitations, how and what such an organism can know. This initial structure constitutes the basis for an actively acquired, evolving, and corrigible cognitive framework within which higher and more complex structures develop.

According to this view, a knower clearly makes a contribution to knowledge. One might argue that this contribution is necessarily prior to experience and therefore, in a sense, *a priori*, but it is not *a priori* in the Kantian sense of being a fixed, invariable contribution. Piagetian cognitive structures evolve with the growth of knowledge; hence, what is contributed by knowers, what *can* be contributed, varies from one level of knowledge to another. Human beings, like all other organisms, are born with a specific organic structure that enables them to develop physically, behaviorally, and mentally according to certain patterns. But these patterns are neither present from the outset in any way that would justify a traditional application of terms such as *a priori* or innate, nor is their evolutionary course predetermined, except by limitations imposed by what is and is not possible, both actually and potentially, within a broad spectrum for such an organism. Piaget writes of his rejection of *a priorism*:

One can feel very close to the spirit of Kantianism . . . and consider the *a priori* as dissociable from the notion of chronological priority or level. The necessity characteristic of the synthesis becomes then a *terminus ad quem* and ceases to be . . . a *terminus a quo* which still remains too close to the pre-established harmony. More precisely, the construction characteristic of the epistemological subject, however rich it is in the Kantian perspective, is still too poor, since it is completely given at the start.⁸

It is nonetheless his conviction, and I think he is right, that rejecting the *a priori* does not destroy his attunement with Kantian epistemology.

The roles of Kantian categories and Piagetian cognitive structures in shaping knowledge are closely analogous. The essential and, for Piaget, crucial difference is that the former are postulated as existing prior to all experience. The latter, by contrast, grow and develop as knowledge is acquired. There is no suggestion here that human nature is fixed so that each human being

⁸*Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, p. 57.

will develop in precisely the same way, whatever the environmental conditions; rather, that there is a structuring of the world and, reciprocally, of knowers is asserted. The manner of this structuring is dependent upon a knower's interaction with the world and will vary accordingly.

The formal conditions of knowing, imposed by human cognitive structures, significantly (but not absolutely) determine the manner of the synthesis. In both Kantian and Piagetian terms, only what can be subjected to these formal conditions can become part of human knowledge. In other words, it makes no sense to say that the mind must somehow "conform" to objects. Objects, if they are to be known, are those things and only those things that are accessible to the structuring powers of minds.

This point can be clarified, on a very simple level, by considering the whistles, pitched too high for the human ear to hear, used in dog races. It could be argued that human beings must know what these whistles are like since they made them. The sound of this whistle, though, is outside the range of what can be assimilated, without special hearing-enhancing devices, by human cognitive equipment.⁹ By extrapolation from this example to other aspects of reality supposedly beyond the range of human experience, it is reasonable to suggest that empirical (that is, phenomenal) reality is, by definition, coextensive with the (current) limitations of human cognitive powers, both actual and potential.¹⁰

⁹I take John Heil's point that "given that, for such creatures, the sort of information picked up is *continuous* with that which we human beings extract from our surroundings, it is perhaps best to regard them as employing senses merely extended relative to our own. Spot responds to a whistle that we cannot hear. It is not that Spot has a special sense that we lack, but that he can hear more (or better) than we can" (in John Heil, *Perception and Cognition* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], p. 18). This point does not, I think, detract from my claim that the dog's "world" is in this respect different: continuity and "extendedness," it seems, shade into difference in kind.

¹⁰I do not claim that human beings are the only creatures who have knowledge properly so-called and that other sentient creatures are excluded from the domain of knowers. The points I am making are about what is real for human beings. What is real for other creatures will, the evidence would suggest, be similar in many respects, different in others. There is evidence of similarity in our capacity to interpret their responses—to recognize when a dog is hungry, for example. We know that bees are sensitive to ultraviolet light, and because *our* experiments can demonstrate this fact, in a sense, too, their experience is part of

Reality per se, however, is not coextensive with human knowledge. Continuous scientific discovery alone justifies the presumption that reality vastly exceeds human understanding and mastery of it; each new discovery points to the possibility of many more. Moreover, what is now opaque to human beings might cease to be; changes are manifestly possible both within reality and within human cognitive capacity. The most that can be asserted, then, is that, if there are aspects of reality that human beings are not equipped to experience, then these aspects simply do not constitute part of human reality—*now*, at least.

But the reciprocity characteristic of cognitive process cannot be too strongly emphasized. Formal and necessary conditions that determine the possible objects of experience are, indeed, imposed upon reality by human knowers; but they are not fabrications of human fancy. Because they create possibilities of knowing whose explanatory capacity can be verified—because reality proves amenable to such structuring—these conditions contribute to the formulation of laws of nature whose objectivity consists in their demonstrated validity over a range of possible experience. These laws set limits upon creativity. For example, the law of gravity was formulated and its lawful character recognized when Newton became capable of understanding aspects of experience in a certain way. One individual discovered new possibilities of creative synthesis, which became part of public knowledge. The movement of falling bodies could then be perceived and known in a new way. Subsequent understanding of the motion of falling bodies is subsumed under this law as a direct result of Newton's discoveries. Experience cannot be resynthesized according to laws of nature that contradict the law of gravity, unless the law itself can somehow be shown to account inadequately for what happens in the world. One is not free, for instance, to claim that a brick, dropped from a building, rises to the sun, all appearances to the contrary. Synthesis is bounded in its creativ-

our reality. It is reasonable, however, to suppose that there is much that is part of the reality of other creatures that is not, and as yet cannot be, part of human reality. This is the only way in which there is a place for something like a noumenal realm in my account of knowledge. There is no reason to assume, though, that what is now unknowable must always remain so.

ity by the fact that there are limitations in the real world to the kind of sense that can be made out of experience. These limitations exist even though, paradoxically, some of them are themselves products of a synthesis created by individual knowers and may, quite conceivably, change with time.

There is no contradiction in claiming both that the world known to human beings is formed or created through the cooperation of active exploration, perception, thinking, and imagining and that knowledge is objective. For something to be an object of human knowledge, it must be amenable to this creative synthesizing; yet objects themselves (that is, real things in the real world), together with formal conditions imposed by human cognitive capacities, determine the manner of the synthesis. Although there are many ways of knowing legitimately so-called, evidence strongly favors the claim that these are ways of knowing one real world.¹¹ The patterns that can be selected are limited in practice by the necessity that they conform, to some degree, to this objective reality. To this extent, objects dictate the nature of the synthesis. That experiential data cannot be synthesized so as to yield knowledge of objects that consistently defy gravity is dictated by the impossibility, in the real world, of finding such objects. A purely free-floating synthesis cannot sustain itself.

Limitations imposed by reality are more stringent for common-sense, practical knowledge than for knowledge of greater theoretical complexity and/or abstraction. In practice, the things it is possible to do with a cup and, in language, the number of meaningful descriptions of a cup are limited by the nature of that cup. Piaget's infant discovers what can and cannot be done as he bangs the cup on the table and explores it with hands, tongue, nose, and eyes. This exploration occurs long before the child, at this stage of development, can recognize *this* cup on a second encounter. At the other end of the spectrum, the number of ways of understanding a particular form of human interaction, such as the victimization of a minority group, increases as sociological, psychological, and political theories achieve greater levels of so-

¹¹ I shall explore this point more fully in chapter 6.

phistication and insight. Because of this freedom of interpretation, claims that the scope of the creative synthesis is quite broad are justifiable.¹²

Limitations upon the creative synthesis are less stringent in pure mathematics at the level of pure abstractions than in simple counting. Principles of counting are quite strictly dictated by the nature of reality,¹³ but in higher mathematics, particularly in its non-numerical branches, it is often difficult to conceive of how the formulations apply to reality at all. Abstract algebra, for instance, has a high degree of freedom: logical necessity and internal consistency are the main limitations upon creativity.

These examples illustrate some of the limitations the nature of reality imposes upon cognitive creativity. Knowledge seekers are significantly, but by no means absolutely, free in cognitive endeavor.

On the basis of evidence in the *Critique of Judgement*, one might suppose that, had the discoveries of modern biology been accessible to Kant, he might have found Piaget's organic explanation of human cognition to be quite compatible with his own thought. In keeping with advances in the biology of his time, Kant rejects any notion that organic nature might be comprehensible from mechanistic explanations, as Descartes, for example, maintains.¹⁴ In organic life, both plant and animal, Kant perceives a relatedness among the parts making up the whole which cannot be accounted for by mechanistic, causal explanations. In a natural, organic being, ". . . its parts (as regards their presence and their form) are only possible through their reference to the whole."¹⁵ In this organic interaction he sees a teleology, a purposiveness, so that an organism is not only an organized thing but also a

¹² Here, too, the normative demands of realism, which I shall elaborate in chapter 6, are both urgent and difficult to meet.

¹³ However, Hilary Putnam argues (in "The Logic of Quantum Mechanics," in *Mathematics, Matter and Method* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975]), that developments in quantum theory require the modification of basic principles of logic. It is conceivable that the same adjustments might, at some time, be necessary for the basic principles of arithmetic and mathematics.

¹⁴ See, for example, the reference to the work of J. F. Blumenbach in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1972), p. 274.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

thing organizing itself. He writes: "An organized being is then not a mere machine, for that has merely *moving* power, but it possesses itself *formative* power of a self-propagating kind which it communicates to its materials though they have it not of themselves; it organizes them, in fact, and this cannot be explained by the mere mechanical faculty of motion. . . . *An organized product of nature is one in which every part is reciprocally purpose [end] and means.*"¹⁶ Given an awareness of biological principles such as equilibration, accommodation, and assimilation, Kant might have found Piaget's work to be largely in harmony with his own view of organic nature.

For Kant, however, there would remain a certain tension, because of the difficulty of reconciling the primarily active nature of experience with its cognitive-intellectual aspect. Piaget insists that categories of understanding develop from active experience grounded in external, knower-independent reality, which gradually structures and is structured by this experience. Kant postulates as preconditions of experience categories that, in Piaget's view, must evolve out of experience itself. In terms of Piaget's account, then, Kant is in the awkward position of having postulated conditions for experience that can only come into existence in experience itself.

Nonetheless, because of his general sympathy for organic explanation, it is possible to move toward an understanding of "the form of the personal"¹⁷ based on Kant's position. This suggestion acquires greater credence in light of one further passage from the *Critique of Judgement*: "For in the complete inner purposiveness of an organized being, the generation of its like is closely bound up with the condition of taking nothing up into the generative power which does not belong, in such a system of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 221–22 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ John Macmurray, in *The Self As Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), claims that an articulation of "the form of the personal" is the crucial task facing contemporary philosophy. The term 'form' has a somewhat specialized meaning for Macmurray, which is certainly not a Platonic one. It means something like principle, or mode of explanation. To seek to understand the form of the personal, then, is to look for some means of dealing, in a general, conceptual way, with the fact that it is persons, in their individuality, their commonality, and their particular circumstances, who act and know.

purposes, to one of its undeveloped original capacities.”¹⁸ Kant may have been unwilling to conceive of the faculty of reason as one of the parts of an organic whole, but it does not stretch “the spirit of Kantianism” unduly to suggest this inclusion as a possible development. Yet we are still some distance from properly creating a place for the personal in this line of thought.

Knowers As Persons

Kant was, admittedly, less concerned about the individuality of particular knowers than about formulating general principles of knowledge and understanding, valid for all subjects in all cognitive circumstances. There is, in Kantian epistemology, the assumption that there is a “standard knower”: one might even suggest that he takes the cognitive processes of an intelligent, forty-year-old Königsberg bachelor as constitutive of the norm for human knowledge in general.¹⁹ A recognition of individual differences among knowers would not destroy his theory, however, and would indeed enhance it. Piaget improves upon the Kantian explanatory model by demonstrating how, in an active synthesis of sensory experience with conceptual awareness (developmentally, experientially achieved), human beings structure the world in which they live. Such an explanation can accommodate individual differences in knowledge (both process and product) within the limitations of human nature and of knowable reality. It retains valuable aspects of Kant’s insights while avoiding some of the more crucial restraints imposed by them.

If an adequate model of the form of the personal is to be discerned within a modified Kantian viewpoint, Kant’s doctrine of the transcendental unity of apperception must be re-cast. For Kant, the possibility of an identical “I think” accompanying all

¹⁸ Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

¹⁹ It would be misleading to imply that Piaget wholly avoids making similar assumptions. He does experiment with large groups of individuals, at least in much of his research (*The Language and Thought of the Child* is a notable exception), and notes different cognitive responses. But he is often criticized for having restricted his research to too narrow a sampling of children (i.e., middle-class Swiss). His move is in the right direction, though it could be developed much more fully.

representations is a necessary precondition of experience, without which the empirically given manifold of sense perception is incapable of being thought and, so, of becoming knowledge. Perceiving and thinking must be so united in one subject that self-consciousness is capable of being a part of all experience. As Kant puts it, "It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me. . . . All the manifold of intuition has, therefore, a necessary relation to the 'I think' in the same subject in which this manifold is found."²⁰ Yet in making "I think" the unifying feature of self-consciousness, Kant does not recognize the primacy of practical action for human beings, as indeed for all organisms. Cognitive activity is primarily practical and only secondarily theoretical.

The Kantian doctrine of the transcendental unity of apperception encounters further difficulties with Piaget's discovery that self-consciousness develops relatively late in a child's growing awareness (just as consciousness itself is a relatively late development in the evolution of complex organisms). Piaget shows that the process of "decentration," whereby self and external world are differentiated from one another, takes place only gradually.²¹ It is not feasible either to discount the existence of early childhood experience or to deny it the status of experience; yet, if self-consciousness develops only as this experience becomes structured, it cannot be declared a necessary precondition of experience. Moreover, the static quality of Kant's view of

²⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 131–32. By speaking thus of the unity of perceiving and thinking in one subject as a condition of experience, Kant may seem to be making a point that is merely obvious. One need only think, though, of Hume's or Russell's descriptions of the self as a bundle of perceptions or as a logical construction, or of the phenomenalist suggestion that the self can be dissolved into a series of psychic events, to recognize that the subject as person all too easily disappears from philosophical view. Furthermore, to grant priority to the unity of perceiving and thinking flies in the face of Piaget's discoveries. Pointing to the randomness of infant cognitive explorations, Piaget demonstrates that experience *precedes* both perceiving and thinking. Random explorations *develop into* perception; it makes no sense to describe them *as* perceptions from the outset. Perception, too, is a developing experiential structure.

²¹ See, for example, *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, p. 142 ff.

the transcendental unity of apperception makes it unlikely that his position could accommodate the way in which cognitive structures seem to develop. Only in a very loose sense is the "I think" identical throughout human life. Because of the primarily active nature of human organisms, where experience plainly occurs prior to thought, neither categories of the understanding nor the transcendental unity of apperception can be postulated as preconditions for experience. Both are gradually generated out of experience.

Finally, the very term "transcendental" connotes the complete separation of knowers from the known so that the reciprocity characteristic of cognitive processes cannot adequately be taken into account. It is worth emphasizing the epistemological significance of two related points here that Kant's theory requires him to overlook. These are, first, that the concept of a neutral observer is quite at odds with human cognitive experience; and secondly, that knowers are involved in what they know, and knowledge is a product of this involvement. Knowledge is always acquired from a certain perspective. This involvement results in a continuous, reciprocal structuring of both knower and known. In a genuine sense, I am not the same person I was before I learned not to fear the dark; and the dark is something different for me now that I no longer fear it. Analogous examples permeate human cognitive experience.

Human sentient and cognitive life is historically situated, and the facts that one speaks, and understands the world, in a certain language and that one knows within a certain cultural milieu influence the shape of the synthesis.²² Acknowledging that there is selectivity in knowledge, based upon subjective factors, forces a more, rather than a less, rigorous examination and analysis of knowledge claims so that the consequences of subjectivity can be evaluated as such. Affective, social, and historical "location" are

²² I discuss the importance for theory of knowledge of the location of human beings within a language in "Language and Knowledge," *Word: Journal of the International Linguistic Association* 31, No. 3 (December, 1980) and the significance of location in a historical context in my "The Importance of Historicism for a Theory of Knowledge," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 22, No. 2 (June 1982).

integral parts of cognitive activity; and there is no neutral observation point from which this evaluative process can be undertaken, for all would-be knowers, epistemologists among them, are subject to the same constraints.

To conclude, though, that knowledge achieved through creative synthesis, whether at a fairly basic, practical, common-sense level or at a more abstract, theoretical level, achieves its status as knowledge simply by virtue of being a product of this synthesis, thus personally reconstrued, would be misleading and, indeed, false. Knowers have self-critical capacities and responsibilities, which must be exercised to know well. As in any reasonable view of what constitutes knowledge, the capacity to withstand criticism and to cope with further evidence are crucial tests of the validity of any knowledge claim. Thus, although the synthesis is central in the process of knowledge acquisition, criteria external to it are brought to bear where justification is required.

We must take due cognizance, therefore, of the social nature of human existence. Cognitive structuring occurs within a social setting where communication and instruction form essential parts of the process from the beginning.²³ This social setting is as important as is the fact that cognitive synthesis takes place within limitations imposed by the environment. Cognitive development begins and continues in a situation where testimony plays a central role: testimony understood in its broadest sense to cover a spectrum ranging from infant interaction with parents to simple conversational exchanges of information, from formal education to independent reading and research. The current state of knowledge about a particular topic, in a knowing community, serves both as a constraining force and as an enabling force in personal cognitive quests.

It would, for example, have been impossible to draw certain conclusions about human genetics before the discovery of the DNA molecule; by the same token, it would be irresponsible, since that discovery, to claim expertise in the subject without taking DNA into account (either as established fact or as a theory to be modified or rejected). The current "state of the art," in any

²³ I explore the implications of this statement more fully in chapter 7.

area of investigation from the most practical to the most theoretical, provides a starting point for further investigation and imposes constraints upon the directions research can take.²⁴

Knowledge can evolve only within the context of communication and (interim) consensus, but this fact does not minimize the importance of particular persons. The sum total of communal knowledge at any point in history is a product of personal efforts to tread an intricate path between a need to make sense of the world (in the sense of making it one's *own*) and a need to understand it in a communally viable way. Viability is not equivalent to conformity, or else no innovation would be possible. But innovation needs to maintain a sufficient degree of contact with existing knowledge to be comprehensible, while stretching beyond it to make new modes of understanding possible. Innovations survive or perish according to whether they ultimately find or fail to find some point of contact with the community, as well as with the way things are.

Since it is only possible, rationally, to create a world that fits into a broader social context (in all but one's most private actions), the relevance of consensus to acceptance and justification of knowledge claims is apparent. Consensus thus viewed is one condition for *establishing* that something is true, but not for its *being* true.²⁵ While innovative, true judgments may initially be formulated by one individual, recognition of their truth generally comes about as their validity for others is established. Cooperation characterizes knowledge-seeking processes as importantly as reciprocity. It is most often in response to other persons that one is led to seek or to produce evidence for knowledge claims; and it is with respect to others that one becomes most clearly aware of obligations to avoid contradiction in searching for knowledge.²⁶

²⁴ This point was central in my discussion of Philip Gosse's intellectual crisis.

²⁵ Plainly, a reliance upon consensus can lead to abuse. One need only think of the Nazis persuading medical scientists to offer evidence that Semitic blood destroyed Aryan stock to realize the possible consequences of such a scientific consensus. Cognitive activity can never escape the need for self-criticism.

²⁶ In this connection, Wittgenstein, for example, observes: "If I were contradicted on all sides and told that this person's name was not what I had always known it was (and I use 'know' here intentionally), then in that case the founda-

Human beings are essentially social creatures (if it is in any way reasonable to speak in terms of essences). It is when knowledge claims are exposed to the public eye that they are most likely to be challenged. Piaget sums these points up as follows: "Logic constitutes the system of relationships which permit the coordination of points of view corresponding to different individuals, as well as those which correspond to the successful percepts or intuitions of the same individual."²⁷ In this way, consensus plays an important role in the synthesis. Consensus is not the ultimate arbiter of truth or justification; there are areas of knowledge where disagreement is not only possible, but inevitable. But a person who disagrees in spite of public protest must take cognizance of current knowledge, if only to show how his or her view will stand in the face of objections.

Epistemology and Human Nature

This line of thought—explicating the cognitive and social nature of knowing subjects—might best be characterized as a move toward developing a "socialized" approach to epistemology, grounded in (cognitive) psychological accounts of "human nature." It involves the belief that theory of knowledge is well advised to proceed in close connection with cognitive psychology in its efforts to understand specifically human methods of constructing knowledge out of experiences of the world.²⁸ Such

tion of all judging would be taken away from me" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 614). The role of the community as arbiter must not be underestimated, yet it also must not be overestimated. Wittgenstein, I think, goes too far with this example. More accurately, one might say the foundations of judging would be *shaken*. If one still had the strong conviction that one was right, one would want to go over the ground again, for oneself. It would, arguably, be irresponsible *not* to follow this inclination.

²⁷ Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies*, trans. Anita Tenza (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 4. Also consider Peirce's observation that "... man is not whole as long as he is single. . . . [H]e is essentially a possible member of society. . . . [O]ne man's experience is nothing, if it stands alone. If he sees what others cannot, we call it hallucination. It is not 'my' experience, but 'our' experience that has to be thought of" (in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vol. 5, p. 259, footnote 2).

²⁸ Alvin Goldman, in "Epistemics: The Regulative Theory of Cognition" (*Journal of Philosophy* 25, No. 10 [October, 1978]), refers to a need to understand our

methods are dependent, for their successful functioning, upon being exercised within a social, communal context.

To link epistemology to investigations of human cognitive nature is certainly not to deny the possibility of developing an evaluative account, as long as nature is not conceived of as static. No fact/value dichotomy is assumed. Mary Midgely puts this point rather well. She writes, "All moral doctrines, all practical suggestions about how we ought to live, depend on some belief about what human nature is like. (This includes doctrines that we 'have no nature', since that means that we are—naturally—quite plastic.) . . . Major moral insights are not independent of psychology: they imply a view about how people essentially are."²⁹ This point holds also for theory of knowledge; and the implication that there are choices within cognitive practice is intentional, as I have explained in chapter 4. It is such choices that make evaluation possible.³⁰

This epistemological stance does not presuppose a static concept of human nature, despite some philosophers' insistence that it must. Peter Winch, for example, criticizing Alasdair MacIntyre's discussion of some ethical issues that parallel these epistemological ones (in *A Short History of Ethics*), argues that the *very possibility* of linking ethical discussion to a picture of human nature depends upon considering that nature to be given and fixed. He writes, "It is hard to see how, once human nature is no longer thought of as something relatively permanent and unchanging, it possibly can provide any explanation of morality."³¹

"information-processing mechanisms." If "information" is not too narrowly construed, this is an apt phrase. Goldman insists, too, that in the process of becoming informed about cognitive psychology, epistemologists must "comprehend *social* as well as *individual* dimensions of cognition" (p. 509n).

²⁹Mary Midgely, *Beast and Man* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 166, 168.

³⁰A similar idea is a central tenet of David Papineau's paper, "Is Epistemology Dead?" (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 32 [1981–1982]), where he declares his primary concern to be: ". . . to show that our theories about ourselves as perceiving beings can indeed play an evaluative role in our intellectual practices" (p. 131).

³¹Peter Winch, "Human Nature," in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 72. In his earlier "Nature and Convention" paper (also in this volume), Winch seems himself to be looking at morality in much the way I

It is not clear, though, that anything in the presuppositions either of ethics or of theory of knowledge suggests *either* that the material dealt with *or* the explanations evolved need or can be fixed and valid for all time. In fact, from an evolutionary point of view, the postulate of fixity is quite unrealistic, since it presupposes that the human organism has achieved some kind of apex in a hierarchy of existence.

MacIntyre's point, both in *A Short History of Ethics* and in *After Virtue*, is that moral theory must keep pace with changes in human nature, reflected in the changing structures of human institutions. Indeed, the history of ethics is a history of attempts to accommodate just such changes; and a similar case can be made for theory of knowledge. Epistemological attempts to accommodate analogous changes can be found in Collingwood's *The Idea of Nature*, in E. A. Burtt's *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, and in Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, with varying degrees of plausibility and success. (A similar concern is central to Rorty's position in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.) The attempts succeed despite the fact that there is greater traditional resistance to suggestions that the data of *science* might change as theories evolve than to the view that human nature and moral theory contribute reciprocally to each other's development.

Winch plainly overstates his case. MacIntyre does not maintain there is *nothing* fixed about human nature, that "the conception of human nature . . . float[s] freely, like currency with no fixed parity," as Winch so eloquently puts it.³² Change takes place within the context of general, persistent features, though not always the *same* features persist. Human beings do not shed their collective natures as dragonflies shed their skins, to acquire entirely new natures demanding wholly new kinds of explanation and new moral or epistemological principles and imperatives. The process is a shifting, changing alteration of a nature that is,

suggest, locating its conditions, possibilities, and grounds of justification within a certain understanding of human nature. This move is specifically evident in his contention that the essentially social dimension of human nature imposes certain preconditions of morality simply per se.

³² Ibid., p. 79.

at least, *there* to shift and change, even if not *given*. The challenge is to evolve philosophical accounts that can deal both with permanence and change: the challenge of all philosophy since Thales.

It is true, as Winch suggests, that “if . . . a man has to choose . . . between alternative moral systems, he will need at the same time and by the same token to decide between rival conceptions of human nature.”³³ It is a psychological truth that we tend to see people differently as our concept of morality (or epistemology) develops and evolves. To recognize this pattern is to acknowledge one more complexity our theories must take into account. But to constrain enquiry with the requirement that any properly theoretical approach start from a fixed concept of the “nature” in question—or must strive to arrive at such a concept—is irresponsible in its Procrustean imposition of requirements that cannot allow “realism” to be understood normatively.

Winch is puzzled about how MacIntyre can *know* that expression of a duty, out of context, is incomplete and incoherent. Such puzzlement presupposes a kind of once and for all demonstration as the only sort of explanation that can reasonably be accepted. But the case, both in morality and in knowledge, can only be made through example, just as MacIntyre does (with greater success in *After Virtue* but not without success in *A Short History of Ethics*). Such an explanation can never be conclusive. It is an “over to you” move, where the onus is upon the reader to decide whether the evidence marshalled does, in fact, make the intended case. Clearly, for Winch it does not; but MacIntyre has not failed to show what leads *him* to make the claims he makes. Furthermore, most of these points, formulated with reference to ethics, are applicable, analogously, to epistemology.

It seems to be correct that if, as Alvin Goldman puts it, “epistemology is in the business of saying what psychological states a cognizer *should* be in in various circumstances, or what states it would be *rational* or *intelligent* for him to be in, we need as good a specification as possible of the range of psychological states open

³³ Ibid., p. 80.

to him.”³⁴ An explication of memory “states,” for example, shows memory to be a complex process. Cognitive psychology’s investigations of its workings give some idea of the degree of reasonableness of certain exhortations. Not all beliefs are “occurrent,” and the process of retrieving belief from memory, crucially dependent upon the accessibility of items stored in the memory, is more intricate, less straightforward, and more dependent upon multifaceted mnemonic techniques than many epistemologists are prepared to allow.

In short, memory just does not seem to work in the way philosophy of science, and epistemology, have long taken for granted. We do not, as is commonly assumed, remember individual events—cumulative collections or lists of data—and draw inferences from their totality. Memories cluster and are stored in “constructions” or “summaries” of past events, some more vivid and hence more readily retrievable than others. Furthermore, memory tends to be conservative in that “a comfortably lodged prototype or general impression is only slightly influenced by new observations.”³⁵ Here we find some explanation for temptations to dogmatism and an indication of why we should see virtue in resisting it. One’s cognitive history is always influential in knowledge-seeking activities, as hypotheses newly framed or generated are influenced by previous hypotheses stored in the memory.

Epistemologists are inclined to work with a conception of belief as “a simple and undecomposable” state or relation.³⁶ But cognitive psychology offers a more complex picture. For epistemic imperatives to be executable, some sense of the extent to which cognitive operations are, in fact, amenable to voluntary control is necessary. Goldman argues that Cartesian “doxastic voluntarism,” according to which judgment and suspension of judgment are subject to the will, is mistaken and that the amount of direct control human beings have over their doxastic attitudes is quite small. If, for example, one accepts an associative theory

³⁴In “Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief,” *The Monist* 61, No. 4 (October, 1978), p. 525.

³⁵See Goldman, “Epistemics: The Regulative Theory of Cognition,” p. 516.

³⁶Goldman, “Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief,” p. 528.

of belief, as some contemporary cognitive psychologists do, then the suggestion that human beings can directly abandon certain epistemically undesirable beliefs becomes problematic.

To argue that doxastic attitudes are not subject to *direct* control is to say that we cannot believe at will. With such a claim I have no quarrel, but this does not negate the claim that such attitudes are subject to indirect control. Attention, to take a clear example, is subject to control, and attention, broadly understood, can account for much of the active and responsible belief acquisition I discuss in chapter 4.

Goldman's investigations have led him to conclude that there are nonpropositional ways of representing or depicting the world.³⁷ He thus allows that "scanning an image" is a part of assessable cognitive activity, despite the fact that many propositional theory defenders (psychologists among them) argue strongly against this view. Piaget's findings indicate that sensory-motor knowledge, too, must be counted as part of the epistemic domain. Just as scanning an image is a way of knowing it better and understanding its cognitive import,³⁸ so, too, we constantly "scan" our memories of complex situations in our efforts to see if we have the right "take" on them. All this activity is part of the self-correcting process at the heart of good knowing.

Normative epistemology must be prepared to appraise cognitive processes more widely than standard procedures have allowed.³⁹ Even cognitive operations now (since Freud) ascribed to the domain of the unconscious need to be taken into account. People can, in somewhat more complex ways even than those Goldman alludes to, understand the causes of or reasons for certain beliefs, even habitual ones. There is evidence that, by slow and careful practice, they can come to modify some of these beliefs and, ultimately, change them.

³⁷ cf. *ibid.*, p. 531.

³⁸ Edmund Wright gives an interesting description of scanning an after-image, playing imaginatively with it, moving things around in it. His description of this process is helpful in showing yet another kind of cognitive activity that is recognizably part of ordinary cognitive experience yet slips through the net of discussions about propositional orthodoxy. See Edmund Wright, "Perception: A New Theory," *The American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, No. 4 (October 1977).

³⁹ cf. also Goldman's "Varieties of Cognitive Appraisal," *Nous* 14, No. 1 (March 1979).

In Goldman's view, epistemology has been dominated by what he calls *minimalism*: "the view that principles of belief-formation and belief-avoidance should be based on as little antecedent belief as possible."⁴⁰ A preferable move would be to endorse *maximalism*,⁴¹ "which invites us to deploy *all* our antecedent beliefs whenever we wish to appraise our cognitive methods."⁴² This describes how we operate in practice; and it is to natural human cognitive practice that epistemology must turn in the final analysis.

Readers may see affinities between Goldman's and Quine's positions here;⁴³ but Quine's is not a normative project. Despite the fact that he appeals to facts about how children learn language (thus inviting comparison with Piaget's position), Quine works with a strongly behavioristic psychology. Nonetheless, Quine, too, believes that philosophers must look to psychology for clues about how human beings construct their pictures of the world. His most significant observation here is that we are creatures who tend to get our inductions right.⁴⁴ This observation suggests that we are somehow justified in drawing inductive inferences about our cognitive activities per se, despite the circularity involved in using inductive inference to justify induction. For Quine, the (real or apparent) circularity of an appeal to psychology is not open to criticism if one is concerned to *understand* cognition rather than to deduce an account of it.⁴⁵

It would be an inadequate conception of human nature that neglected to mention *feeling* in discussions of cognitive practice.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴¹ See my contrast between "thin" and "thick" descriptions in chapter 2; "minimalism" works in terms of "thin" descriptions, "maximalism" favors "thick" ones.

⁴² Goldman, "Varieties of Cognitive Appraisal," p. 29.

⁴³ See, for example, Quine's paper "Epistemology Naturalized," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). Goldman acknowledges these similarities but points out that Quine's aims have more to do with explanation than his own, normative position.

⁴⁴ See Quine, "Natural Kinds," in op. cit., especially p. 126.

⁴⁵ Op. cit., pp. 76–76. Consider, in this connection, Putnam's observation that "a piece of knowledge (i.e. a 'true statement') is a statement that a rational being would accept on sufficient experience of the kind that it is actually possible for beings with our nature to have. 'Truth' in any other sense is inaccessible to us and inconceivable by us" (*Reason, Truth and History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], p. 64).

People care about what they know, about what they do, and about other people whom these knowings and doings influence and affect. This caring seems to be a natural human propensity. Lawrence Blum is right to maintain that “a person’s characteristic or particular emotional reactions (or lack thereof) reflect on him morally,”⁴⁶ at least when one can do something about these characteristics, cultivating desirable ones and ridding oneself of undesirable ones. Blum holds, too, that the moral self “cannot plausibly be conceived to exclude phenomena with regard to which we are passive,”⁴⁷ “phenomena” meaning feelings and emotions that we suffer passively rather than feel actively. Though I am in general sympathy with Blum’s position, I question whether these are phenomena “with regard to which we are [wholly] passive.” We cannot be obliged to feel in certain ways, but this area is nonetheless one over which we have a measure of control that is by no means insignificant.

Repression of affectivity is certainly not the end toward which one must work in order to alter perceptual sensitivity. As I suggested in my discussion of Gosse the elder, the aim of being wholly unswayed by emotion can lead to tragedy. To alter one’s “characteristic or particular emotional reactions” is far from easy; but then, virtuous attitudes are never easily achieved. If they could not be altered at all, though, it would be unreasonable and unfair to claim that such reactions “reflect on [one] morally.” Rather than challenging Kantian obeisance to the dictates of pure reason as opposed to affectivity, it may in fact be more appropriate to take issue with both Kant’s and Blum’s presupposition that human beings are purely passive with regard to emotions.

Consequences

One of the strengths of Kantian philosophy is that it places the acting subject at the center of moral situations, much as it places the knowing subject at the center of cognitive situations. This

⁴⁶ In Lawrence Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality*, p. 169.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

view is broader than the one available from a utilitarian concentration upon states of affairs as the only proper subject of moral evaluation. In elaborating the potential implications of a Kantian position, it is appropriate to consider who is acting in a particular situation and who is responsible for the shape the situation takes. It is unclear, though, just how effective Kantian morality itself can be, given what Bernard Williams, for example, characterizes as the "impoverished and abstract character of persons as moral agents"⁴⁸ upon which it is based. The Kantian concept of the person is not rich enough to allow for the significance of individual human character or for the influence of personal relations in moral (or in cognitive) experience. Yet Kant's insights into the creative nature of human experience provide a valuable starting point for further reflection.

I have tried to sketch a picture of human knowers that retains some of these Kantian insights, while broadening the concept of the subject to benefit from some of the implications of cognitive psychological findings. This broadened concept could provide a better basis for a normative approach to human knowledge. It is both in touch with the nature of epistemic life and capable of indicating the viability of certain kinds of normative epistemological claims.

The objection, however, that no valid epistemological purpose can be served by appealing to cognitive psychology is not infrequently voiced. As I remarked earlier, for Frege and Popper a knower is an irrelevant or merely incidental moment in the emergence of knowledge. Richard Rorty is the most noteworthy among the more recent objectors to attempts to derive epistemological insights from what we know about human nature. The crux of his objections is summarized as follows: "The whole seventeenth-century notion that we learn more about what we should believe by understanding how we work can be seen to be as misguided as the notion that we shall learn whether to grant civil rights to robots by understanding better how they work."⁴⁹

⁴⁸See Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 4.

⁴⁹*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 255.

The analogy is unconvincing. It is precisely because we know what kinds of things robots are—which must be part of what we mean when we say we know how they work—that we have no doubt whatsoever about whether they should be granted civil rights. Robots simply do not need, do not request, and are not able to use civil rights. We know these facts because we know how they work and what kinds of things they are. The “seventeenth-century notion” cannot be shown to be misguided by the use of this sort of analogy.

In its seventeenth-century form, the notion Rorty criticizes is, in fact, open to criticisms, which I have already mentioned in my discussion of Kant. In the seventeenth century, it was an unquestioned presupposition that a philosopher’s understanding of the workings of his own mind would count as a valid paradigm for understanding human cognitive processes in general. This assumption is unwarranted, though, since it fails to account for how cognitive “location” bears on the nature and results of knowledge-seeking processes. Rorty is right to reject this seventeenth-century idea of understanding; but the birth and development of cognitive psychology have altered the picture, even if psychology cannot yet—or perhaps ever—offer complete and wholly adequate explanations of human cognition. Anything we can recognize as a constraint upon human cognitive capacity or as a mark of the way in which human beings, given the kind of cognitive equipment they have, are disposed to structure experience is potentially helpful in setting out normative epistemological claims. Rorty’s reference to “what we should believe” implies such normative claims, so it is important to look more closely at his arguments.

Rorty’s more specific objections are of two main kinds: first, he sees in appeals to human nature an attempt to provide illegitimate, alternative foundations for human knowledge. Such an appeal sits uneasily with his view that the very possibility of foundations is highly questionable. Second, he claims that all moves in this direction commit a naturalistic fallacy analogous to the naturalistic fallacy in ethics. I shall consider each of these objections in turn.

Rorty wonders “whether the idea of epistemic . . . authority

having a 'ground' in nature is a coherent one,"⁵⁰ insisting that the "new epistemology" (by which he means attempts by Quine and Sellars to replace foundationalist epistemology by using psychological results to produce a general theory of inner representations) "can offer nothing relevant to issues of justification."⁵¹ Despite my endorsement of Quine's observation about our capacity to get inductive inferences right, I do not contend that such accounts could provide epistemic authority with a ground in nature. My point, rather, is that the presupposition that all knowers are alike (and, in fact, exactly like the theorist of knowledge) and that they are equally able to act according to a prescribed method fails to account for how human beings are, something we need to know a good deal about to assess the viability of our normative urgings.

On a basic level, it would be ridiculous to insist that human beings must learn to distinguish ultraviolet light from infrared radiation before they can become licensed automobile operators. It is not ridiculous, though, to insist that they be able to distinguish red lights from green. The difference depends entirely on what we know of human perceptual capacity. Analogous examples proliferate for less basic modes of knowing. Furthermore, understanding how people can perform cognitively is of assistance in philosophical endeavors to evaluate evidence and justification claims. When the model of the ideal cognizer is abandoned—the perfect judge who gives assent only when in possession of total evidence—we shall be able to see that knowing something about the nature of human cognitive processes may show that a person can be justified in maintaining a certain belief, even without having considered a specific kind of evidence, because that evidence was inaccessible to her. The dyslexic person mentioned in chapter 3 or Mr. Magoo are cases in point: justified, as long as they remain unaware of their respective conditions, in believing what they do believe, even though what they believe is not true (and Mr. Magoo does seem, generally, to be unaware of his own perceptual incapacity). Such considerations are useful in revealing complexities in the concept of

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

justification that we must acknowledge if our evaluations are to be sound. Justification becomes more knower-specific once these points are allowed and, hence, more challenging to demonstrate and evaluate effectively.

The “naturalistic fallacy” Rorty finds, both in the “seventeenth-century notion” he rejects and in later attempts to relate epistemology to psychology, is characterized in its starkest form as an attempt to “analyse epistemic facts without remainder into non-epistemic facts,”⁵² or as the view that “a simple and relaxed physicalism might be the only sort of ontological view needed.”⁵³ But epistemological appeals to disciplines such as psychology and physiology do not necessarily imply such views. There is no suggestion whatsoever that “nonepistemic facts” that limit the shape and development of epistemic facts could constitute an analysis of the latter without remainder. Piaget rightly maintains, in this connection, that philosophy’s evaluative (that is, normative) task begins when it has taken genetic epistemology into account and shaped its mode of procedure accordingly. The process is best explained as a dialectical one, where the interplay of epistemic and nonepistemic considerations shapes ensuing theory. In this view, there is no question of reducing epistemic considerations to nonepistemic ones. The further suggestion that “physicalism” is the only ontological view suited to these purposes seems to imply that a mechanistic behaviorism is the only possible kind of psychological theory such a move could espouse. But this conclusion is by no means inevitable. Piaget would certainly not endorse it.

Nor would it be fair to say that the project is one of trying to understand cognition genetically in order to “be in a better position to congratulate ourselves on accurately mirroring nature (or to lament our failure),” to use Rorty’s words.⁵⁴ Rather, appeals to psychology are directed toward understanding as much as we can about human cognitive capacity, and about the limitations normative claims will necessarily meet, *within which* they need to work.

⁵² Ibid., p. 141.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 165.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

To understand what human beings, by virtue of their nature, can know is hardly equivalent to finding a way of saying that we are coping with Nature pretty well, by our lights.⁵⁵ Its aim and intention are normative rather than purely descriptive. It is based on the conviction that adequate epistemological explications require a psychological basis. Only thus can they account for how it is and can be for human beings in the *Lebenswelt*. This requirement is analogous to the ethical case, where it is important to understand what can and cannot be demanded, expected, or achieved, both in action and in acquired virtue.

For Kant, one of the fundamental questions of philosophy is "What can I know?" In my view, insight into the nature of the knower is required to answer this question satisfactorily. If the question is read with the emphasis upon the first verb—"What *can* I know?"—then clearly part of the answer, and an important part, must be in terms of the nature of cognitive capacity. If it is read with the emphasis upon the pronoun—"What can *I* know?"—then who I am, the circumstances of my epistemic life, my cognitive "location" will rightly figure in the reply. Emphasis upon the *I*, upon the knower, permits the recognition that what holds knowledge together is a real human being: not just someone who *could* say "I think," as in the theory of the transcendental unity of apperception. Only if the emphasis is entirely upon the last verb—"What can I *know*?"—is there any justification for neglecting the other terms; but I can see no reason for privileging the latter reading.

⁵⁵ This phrase is Rorty's (*ibid.*, p. 298), who sees the approach to amount to "naturalizing" epistemology. Yet he does seem to use the term "naturalize" in a quite different sense, or at least with different evaluative force, later in the book where he says: "The trouble with Platonic notions is not that they are 'wrong' but that there is not a great deal to be said about them—specifically, there is no way to 'naturalize' them or otherwise connect them to the rest of inquiry, or culture, or life" (p. 311). The impression is, clearly, that they would be more philosophically useful if there were such a way. Also, he later seems to applaud Dewey's having become "sufficiently naturalistic to think of human beings in Darwinian terms" (p. 362 n). There seems to be a certain tension between these claims and his earlier criticisms.

CHAPTER 6

Realism and Understanding

Realism, Truth, and Intellectual Virtue

Philip Gosse's efforts to live with the paradox that truth "has two forms," indisputable yet antagonistic, would be difficult to account for in terms of the theories of truth usually associated with foundationalism and coherentism. It is difficult to see how two outrightly contradictory propositions could both be shown to correspond with reality or to be coherent within an established system of true propositions. Even on a pragmatist theory of truth, where knowledge and belief make a difference to action, it is difficult to see how two incompatible propositions could be declared true of the same experience at the same time. The possibilities for action they point to would, in their incompatibility, immobilize the knower.¹ Yet at the core of correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories of truth reside implicit ideals of good knowing and a fundamental respect for realism.

These theories have roots in a more ancient realism, where emphasis is not so much upon the connection of propositions to reality as upon particular ways of establishing the relation of knowers to what is known. I shall cite just two modes of conceiv-

¹ For example, in "The Fixation of Belief" (in the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vol. V), Peirce appears to presuppose that knowers/believers fix beliefs of all sorts in one and the same way at any given time. Gosse's dilemma, however, arises from the fact that two different ways of fixing beliefs, operating in two different areas, suddenly come into conflict.

ing this relation that, in their divergent ways of construing it, give some indication of the spectrum of positions this traditional realism encompasses.

For Plato, only the Forms are real. Knowledge properly so-called, and hence truth, can be attained only when the soul becomes capable of direct contemplation of these Forms. This state of affairs is an "all-or-nothing" one: it does not admit of degree. Either one knows the Forms, the *real*, or one remains in the realm of opinion. In everyday sensory experience, nothing worthy of the name "knowledge" (*episteme*) is possible. By contrast, for Locke, for whom the world of sensory experience *is* the real world, simple ideas are true. They conform to real things and form the bond between thought and reality. The senses give us an assurance that deserves the name "knowledge." The given is real and, as given, it is both knowable and true. Only when knowers begin to form complex ideas, and hence when propositional formulation becomes a central part of the process, do distortion and error creep in. Nonetheless, reality exists independently of human beings, and we can know it as such.

For more modern correspondence theories of truth, central to most foundationalist positions, a knowledge claim is established and considered warranted when it can be traced back to claims founded on a demonstrated correspondence to reality, from which the claim can be seen to follow by a direct chain of inference. Truth, particularly since the time of Moore and Russell, is the property of propositions: not of sentences, but of what sentences mean. Truth consists, then, in a relation between propositions and facts. Knowledge claims are warranted only when this relation can be established to be one of correspondence.

For coherentists, a judgment is true when it forms part of a system whose elements are related to each other by ties of logical implication. In its metaphysical construal, the theory holds that a statement is true if it is coherent within a comprehensive account of the nature of reality, which itself forms a coherent system, and can be known to form such a system. In the positivistic construal of the theory, true statements must cohere within the system accepted by received scientific doctrine: a system that can be

analyzed into observation or "protocol" statements, themselves checkable against reality. Each formulation rests upon an underlying realist presupposition.

The most pressing problem for a correspondence theorist, however, is to establish just what it means for a proposition to correspond to reality. Attempts to solve this problem, from Moore's defense of common sense, through Russell's and Wittgenstein's logical atomism, to Tarski's theory of truth, have met with minimal success. Foundationalist epistemology, in its dependence upon the successful establishment of such correspondence relations for its basic propositions, is faced both with the problem of regress and with the concomitant problem of showing how its ultimate claims really do relate to reality. Coherence theory fares little better, for, as I indicated in my elaboration of Sosa's position in chapter 3, coherentism, if it is not to advocate a purely free-floating coherence, depends for its connection with reality upon what amount of foundationalist claims. A coherent system must connect with the world to count as knowledge. To do so, it must establish a relation of correspondence with reality, thus it falls prey to the same difficulties that face correspondence-foundationalist theories.

It would be inaccurate to speak as though pragmatism were a single philosophical position, given its different formulations by philosophers generally grouped under this name. Pragmatic theories of *truth* are equally diverse, but they share the view that evidence for the truth of a belief must come from its practical effects upon human action. Peirce is most concerned with its effects within scientific practice: indeed, science seems, for him, to be the locus of truth. James is more interested in truth, broadly construed, as it is manifested when beliefs serve human needs to predict experience and cope with the environment. Often he seems to equate truth with expediency. Dewey is profoundly puzzled by efforts to establish what correspondence could mean in practice. Truth, for him, is a mutable concept: an idea is true when it can be verified, or seen to be warranted, in practice.

In fact, pragmatism is really much more a theory about knowing, in the sense of "finding one's way about in the world," than it

is a theory of truth.² Generally accepted meanings of “true” seem to get lost in pragmatic formulations. Yet pragmatists share a concern to know and understand the world *well*. In this respect, their work is based in an implicitly normative understanding of realism.

A kind of normative realism constitutes the implicit ideal of good knowing at the core of correspondence and coherence theories of truth and knowledge, too. Although actual correspondence relations are difficult, if not impossible, to establish, sustaining the effort to do so as well as possible is a mark of virtuous intellectual conduct. Likewise, although coherence ultimately fails to establish itself as *the* theory of truth, within it, too, there is a core ideal worthy of preservation. Knowing well is importantly connected with efforts to see particular cognitive endeavors in context in order to achieve a just estimation of their significance and of how well they fit within ways of knowing the world that have, so far, proven successful. A coherentist wants things to hang together logically, come what may. Perhaps, then, his or her virtue lies in following arguments wherever they may lead, however unwelcome the conclusions.

Coherentists tend to forget, however, that knowledge seeking is not a matter simply of having correct methodological principles to guide one: principles about consistency and avoidance of contradiction, for instance. To possess a good methodology for knowledge acquisition can be both constraining and liberating. It can ensure neither that it (that is, the methodology itself) is always properly applied nor that it is always the proper one *to* apply.

Apart from methodology, it is equally important that one be open to as many options as a particular event or state of affairs allows. What appears, *prima facie*, to be inconsistent or contradictory, incoherent or unfounded, might prove not to be so at all

²Hence, Richard Rorty observes of the pragmatist: “He shares with the positivist the Baconian and Hobbesian notion that knowledge is power, a tool for coping with reality. . . . He drops the notion of truth as correspondence altogether, and says that modern science does not enable us to cope because it corresponds, it just plain enables us to cope” (in *Consequences of Pragmatism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982], p. xvii).

when certain perceptual and/or cognitive biases are acknowledged and circumnavigated. Much of cognitive activity consists *not* in adopting a specific, spelled-out methodology (such as the Cartesian method or Peirce's full praise for the scientific method), but in approaching experience so that an adequate apprehension of its multidimensionality becomes possible. Such approaches often receive much needed stimulus from cognitive agents who are prepared to take outrageous stances for the sake of seeing what results they might yield: from those catalysts of cognitive change mentioned in chapter 3. Learning to take them seriously, to consider what their pronouncements might entail, may well involve coming to terms with prejudices and fears and with theory-constraints that stand in the way of realistic apprehension; it may involve turning one's back upon a set of comfortable, complacently accepted beliefs and being prepared to reconsider one's entire doxastic stance. This move is one Philip Gosse was unable to make. When it can be made, it opens far more possibilities than it negates.

Normative Realism

The basis for an initial presumption that Philip Gosse is an intellectually virtuous person is that he is a person for whom realism has strong normative force. This fact is evident in his intellectual attitudes: his orientation toward the world, toward his knowledge-seeking self, and toward other people. Such an attitude is marked by a commitment to let things speak for themselves rather than by any desire to impose one's cognitive structurings upon the world. Intellectual honesty demands a careful balancing of these two sides of cognitive process: self and world.

The need to elaborate a normative sense of "realism" connects with a fundamental presupposition of this book, illustrated in the Gosse story: namely, that people have attitudes to knowledge that shape both its structure and its content. Knowledge matters to people. We need to understand the manner of its mattering and the implications thereof if we are to understand what is involved in being epistemically responsible.

A realist position is one for which that part of reality philoso-

phers commonly refer to as “the external world” is independent of knowers yet knowable by them.³ *Realistic* self-knowledge is also possible, though the relation of independence does not hold for the objects of self-knowledge in quite the same way as for those in the external world. The claim that one can know oneself realistically amounts to a denial of ultimate privilege and authority to first-person statements about oneself, since self-knowledge is often dependent upon being open to how others see/know one. To interpret realism normatively is by no means unproblematic within this philosophical position with its strong Kantian affinities, which are particularly evident in its recognition of creativity and choice in the way human beings make sense of their experience. But I think that realism and the kind of idealism implicit in this view of the creativity of knowledge are, in fact, compatible.

The amount of recalcitrance objects persistently exhibit to human creative and cognitive efforts and wishes makes it most reasonable to affirm the knower-independence of reality. Nevertheless, this reality need not be declared wholly inaccessible “in itself” to our cognition and creativity, as Kant would have it. We can structure experience into reasonably coherent patterns of knowledge and understanding, even though we may not know the precise relation of these patterns to the reality they purport to reflect. We manage to find our way about it quite well, even though different aspects of what seems to be the *same* reality are coherent for different people in the same circumstances and for the same person in different circumstances, and though our control over experience continually meets with limiting cases, reminding us that reality transcends our knowledge of it. Reality is neither purely transparent nor perfectly opaque to human cognitive activity. That it is not purely transparent is evidence of its independence of human anticipations and expectations; that it is not perfectly opaque justifies denying its radical unknowability.

³Where reference is to the external world, it is important to speak of “knower-independent” rather than “mind-independent” reality in order to forestall any suggestion that knowledge could be an achievement of disembodied minds or intellects. The whole person is involved in cognition, even though the “mind” (elusive though it may be) seems to be the “processing location” of what emerges as knowledge.

At the minimal level, the persistence of certain kinds of experience that it is impossible either to alter, or to eliminate simply by wishing, is a sign of the existence of knower-independent reality. The problem is to understand just what kind of sign it is. Such understanding increases as we succeed in apprehending relations among experiences: in seeing some experiences as reasons for expecting others and some as reasons for rejecting certain interpretations and entertaining redirected expectations. The process is a matter of forging connections, and it is clear that connections cannot randomly be forged even though there is choice and creativity involved. In short, the primary goal of knowledge is to be true to something beyond it; "It seeks something which it knows it may miss."⁴

This "something beyond" is constantly recalcitrant to our efforts to make it other than it is, either actually or potentially. We are aware that we do not conjure it up, partly because we cannot conjure it away, and we cannot change it at will. Furthermore, in the community where our cognitive efforts take place, we can ask questions about objects of experience and reasonably expect them to have answers; reasonably in that, more often than not, they do, even if the "answer" is in the form of shared puzzlement. The fact that common questions arise suggests that objects are, at the very least, not maintained in existence by just one mind: mine. They may, perhaps, be held in existence by all those who can experience and answer questions about them; but there is no better reason to assume this to be so than there is to assume that objects simply are there. Indeed, the presumption is strongly in favor of the latter stance.

⁴The phrase is C. I. Lewis's (in *Mind and the World Order* [New York: Dover Publications, 1956], p. 191). Much of what I am saying in this section is influenced by the way Lewis states his case in chapter 6 of this work, "The Relativity of Knowledge and the Independence of the Real." His position is by no means unproblematic, as Sandra Rosenthal, for example, points out in her paper, "From Meaning to Metaphysics: C. I. Lewis and the Pragmatic Path," *The Review of Metaphysics* 33, No. 3 (March 1980). Nonetheless, I find Lewis' position a *reasonable* one, given what we now know of human cognitive limitations. Rosenthal's discussion of Lewis assumes a strong disjunction between realism and idealism, but I see no tension between a Kantian emphasis upon creativity in knowing and a fuller realism.

Yet, as C. I. Lewis puts it, "There is no contradiction between the relativity of knowledge and the independence of its object. If the real object can be known at all, it can be known only in its relation to a mind; and if the mind were different the nature of the object known might well be different. Nevertheless the description of the object as known is a true description of an independent reality."⁵ The point is not that we can know that there is a coherent, fully structured, independent reality mirrored by cognition in adequate knowledge. The degree of relativity evident in many adequate, but different, mirrorings indicates that this stance is not viable. At best, we can accumulate increasing support for certain approximations that deal adequately with reality while rejecting others as their inadequacy becomes apparent. We do seem to be able to accumulate knowledge about what reality *is not*, even though it is not clear how much we truly know what it *is*.

The important point, then, is that knowledge and understanding are modes of interpreting experience. Reality, in so far as it can be understood at all, can be understood and interpreted only by cognitive agents in actual or possible situations. As it is known, reality is knower-relative, then; but a relativism of this nature would by no means endorse just any mode of interpretation.⁶

A perspectival model offers a plausible way of understanding the relations among reality, knowledge, experience, and interpretation. On this model, I assume there to be different perspectives upon the same reality, both within the experience of one

⁵C. I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order*, p. 155.

⁶Thus, for example, in characterizing his own "internalist" position (which, he insists, is not "a facile relativism that says 'Anything goes'"), Hilary Putnam writes:

Internalism does not deny that there are experiential *inputs* to knowledge; knowledge is not a story with no constraints except *internal* coherence; but it does deny that there are any inputs *which admit of only one description, independent of all conceptual choices*. Even our description of our own sensations, so dear as a starting point for knowledge to generations of epistemologists, is heavily affected (as are the sensations themselves, for that matter) by a host of conceptual choices. The very inputs upon which our knowledge is based are conceptually contaminated; but contaminated inputs are better than none. If contaminated inputs are all we have, still all we have has proved to be quite a bit. (Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], p. 54, emphasis in original)

knower and from one knower to another, all equally worthy of designation as knowledge and/or understanding. An analogy with a “hall of mirrors” in a circus or fair will (*pace* Rorty) clarify this point. My nature as a physical being and the specifications of the mirrors limit the reflections that can exist, just as the nature of reality and of human cognitive processes together limit the kinds of knowledge there can be. The distorted reflections of myself that I see in such a sequence of mirrors do not make me doubt the reality of my existence in a specific, reasonably persistent form. Differences relative to the particular mirrors do not mean that what is reflected is “mirror-dependent” for its existence. But they do show that there are many ways of seeing this form—emphasizing some aspects of it, minimizing or concealing others—just as there are in knower-dependent knowledge of reality. There is a certain disanalogy in the example, however, since there does seem to be a privileged mirroring—the one reflected in the “normal” mirror—indicated in my reference to the others as “distortions.” A privileged knowing cannot be designated as clearly within knowledge in general.

To construe “realism” normatively is to declare that the value in knowing and understanding how things are is greater than, and subsumes, the value of holding to favored theories and cherished views of how they must be. Once it is assumed that there is some choice about how reality is to be known, then there must be imperatives to limit what can count as knowledge. The broadest of these imperatives is that realism must be accorded normative force. One is to be guided in cognitive enterprises by an aim to understand how things really are, however difficult it may be to achieve such understanding. One should not rest content with partial, simplified, or distorted accounts when, with greater effort, more adequate and more accurate ones can be achieved. This idea may be neither startling nor new in epistemological thinking: indeed, most epistemologists would endorse it. It tends, though, to be taken for granted as an implicit goal of cognitive activity. It is not often explicitly articulated nor discussed in a specifically normative context where its connections to intellectual virtue are emphasized.

The background condition of normative realism is “a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness,” to use Iris Murdoch’s words.⁷ To perceive realistically is morally important, both in its own right (as a purely epistemic concern) and because perception is the cognitive basis for action. Murdoch expresses well just what is at issue: “By opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us. We are anxiety-ridden animals. Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying *veil* which partially conceals the world.”⁸ The process of acquiring knowledge is as open to evaluation as are its outer, publicly observable products, for “it is a *task* to come to see the world as it is.”⁹ The manner of performing this task determines the quality of knowledge achieved.

This moral stance is a realist one, parallel to an epistemological realism, whose goals are “right” perception and cognition. Achieving these goals requires both honesty and humility: honesty not to pretend to know what one does not know (and *knows* one does not) or to ignore its relevance; humility not to yield to temptations to suppress facts damning to one’s theory.¹⁰ This struggle to perceive justly arises precisely because human knowers are not passive recorders of experience.

The interpretation of much of human experience, whether of the traditionally moral variety or otherwise, allows for a wide range of responsibility in apprehending—in *knowing*—what is at issue. Differences in apprehending situations (that is, differences at the cognitive level) are apparent in attributions of intellectual virtue. Lawrence Blum puts the point this way: “That there are two parts to what is involved in moral action (apprehension and acting) . . . is often not appreciated in moral

⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, p. 91.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰ Robert Nozick touches on a similar point in his preface to *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974). He claims that “intellectual honesty demands that, occasionally at least, we go out of our way to confront strong arguments opposed to our views” (p. x). This states a *prescription* for avoiding dogmatism: one strongly to be avoided consequence of not bothering to see properly. Nozick goes on, “Only the refusal to listen guarantees one against being ensnared by the truth” (p. xi).

philosophy. Rather, the apprehension, and hence the description, of the situation is taken for granted, and the focus placed solely on how the person acts in the situation.”¹¹

The unacceptability of taking for granted that all knowers know in just the same way shows something of the inadequacy of the model of the neutral observer. It cannot be overemphasized that persons are not inert receivers of information who, because of their common rational structures, all perceive (that is, record) in precisely the same way, though they may differ in their modes of response to what they have perceived. The essential point is that the manner of apprehension—the cognitive side of situations—is open to evaluation in its own right, even when it seems to be an “end state” and not specifically a basis for actions typically judged by moral philosophy.

Normative realism is primarily a matter of cultivating a certain attitude to the world, to oneself, and to other persons as knowers. When such an attitude is well cultivated, it tends to become a matter of habit, a sensitivity to the demands and implications of moral and epistemic situations. There emerges a reasonably constant, reliable perceptual capacity,¹² an ability to recognize requirements that situations impose upon one’s conduct. This capacity can be cultivated or suppressed, perhaps by example, self-discipline, instruction, or in consequence of certain failures. One can hence be praised or blamed for having or not having it.

It is reasonable to assume that there are right and wrong answers to questions about these requirements imposed upon one’s conduct, even though the answers may not be precisely the same for every knower and even though no set of rules could be produced for specifying, incontrovertibly, what should be done in every kind of situation. To discover these answers requires a certain humility before objects of experience so that they speak for themselves, and an openness to what these objects might mean. The ideal of achieving as good a “fit” as possible with the

¹¹Op. cit., p. 133.

¹²This description is, at least, how John McDowell conceives of the ability in “Virtue and Reason.” I am indebted to his argument in this article for the points I am making here.

world persists in this form when older, stricter correspondence requirements are abandoned.

Knowledge claims are rarely made by persons who stand alone, separated from their past and the past of their community, face to face with an experience that must be assimilated "cold." Efforts to know are part of human lives, lived in communities with histories. Claims to know must not only be true to the experience currently demanding explanation but must also find a place in a complex network of established products of cognitive endeavors.¹³ Coherence, too, is a persistent ideal.

This network is not so rigidly constituted that it determines what can count as adequate knowledge in every instance. Indeed, any specific instance may be the one to tear or collapse the net. But this disruption occurs within the context of a network's capacity to provide checks and of the need to take its existence into account, if only to challenge it. It would be a mistake, then, to argue from the relativity of knowledge to the conclusion that objects of knowledge are completely knower-dependent. In view of the different perspectives from which they originate, one knower's "take" on a situation may include aspects wholly absent from another's "take," yet be an accurate viewing of an object that persists independently of all such knowings. Even among accurate "takes," however, some are better, both morally and epistemically, than others.

Some examples will show more plainly what normative, perspectival realism entails. R. G. Collingwood proposes what amounts to a normatively realistic approach to historical knowledge.¹⁴ He urges that valid historical accounts must begin with attempts by historians to reconstruct and reenter a situation, reconstituting it in thought as one has reason to believe it must

¹³I use the phrase "true to" intentionally here. A normative construal of "realism" is not tightly bound by a binary system of truth values. It allows many ways of *rightly* knowing and understanding the same situation. "True to" conveys this ambiguity and the implicit moral claims inherent in this construal of "realism." Being "true to" a set of circumstances, facts, or states of affairs is to be distinguished from the absolute implications of what is to be "True."

¹⁴This position is elaborated in the chapter on "question and answer logic" in his *Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), and in *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), especially in "Part V: Epilogemena."

have been lived. A right sense of the situation as it must have been in its own time is required if claims to historical understanding are justified. Perhaps not surprisingly, Collingwood's critics declare his methodology to be everything from impossible to preposterous. It is hard to imagine how, within the terms of most traditional theories of knowledge, a historian could substantiate the claim, for example, that *this* must have been how it was for the Romans in Britain. Foundationally, such substantiation could not be provided, although one might go some way toward demonstrating the coherence of one's claims with other established facts about life in Roman Britain. Nonetheless, such an enterprise is directed toward approaching the past realistically, so that the reality of the past *dictates* what can be known about it and the object of the inquiry is granted sovereign sway.

Arthur Koestler captures another aspect of normative realism. In *The Act of Creation*,¹⁵ he shows how a closed-minded approach to laboratory experiments tends to impede research and discovery. The message of his history of scientific discovery (avowedly creative in its own right) is that innovative discoveries require both a mind prepared to perceive what others cannot see and an openness to the unexpected: a readiness, one might say, to be disturbed by findings that threaten the complacency of received doctrine. Too narrow a sense of the situation closes off possibilities; too open a sense allows an "anything goes" attitude and hence loses sight of the constraints necessarily and properly inherent in normative realism.

To cite another example, painters before the same subject are most unlikely to replicate each others' paintings. The resemblance from one painting to the next may, in fact, be slight. Furthermore, it often turns out that some of them are better and some worse, not just aesthetically, but also epistemically. This rightness need not be a matter of trueness to life (Matisse observes, "L'exactitude n'est pas la vérité"). Responsibility toward the object, then, does not seem to be *direct*; it is a responsibility of receptivity, both active and passive. On the passive side, one's

¹⁵ London: Pan Books, 1966.

conceptual (viewing) orientation needs to be un-closed, incomplete; on the active side, it needs to be both alert and expectant.

Acquiring an accurate, right *sense* of a situation is a primary epistemic task, then, just as a writer's attempt to find a right form of expression is, in large part, an epistemic problem. Rightness in the latter context is manifested in a successful effort to establish connections among creator, work, world, and reader or audience as participant in the work. Such rightness is closely bound up with a normative understanding of realism, though not with the proviso that literature, to succeed, must be about actual events, realistically depicted. Rightness is achieved to the extent that the work succeeds in connecting real and fictional experiences, credibly forging them into a whole.

This notion—having a “right sense of the situation”—is curiously elusive, in spite of its importance to knowledge and understanding. It is a capacity one can seek to cultivate in oneself and an attitude one can seek in kindred spirits. But it is difficult to see how one could properly enjoin it in friends, colleagues, children, or students. It is conveyed by example, just as MacIntyre's *characters* provide moral exemplars and as the man of virtue serves as a model of human excellence for Aristotle. Explorations of cognitive experiences where evident efforts are made to arrive at a right sense of the situation offer a way of seeing what kind of attitude of mind is appropriately realistic in recognizing the sovereignty of the object and the limitations of human cognition.

Subjectivism and Dogmatism

Failure to respond to the normative demands of realism can result in the loss of that delicate balance between self and world that the intellectually virtuous strive to maintain. It can result in outright subjectivism, the antithesis of epistemically responsible knowing.

“Subjectivism” must be distinguished from “subjectivity”: the former carries negative implications that do not attach to the

latter. "Subjectivity" involves recognizing the full person-hood and epistemological centrality of knowing subjects, of which theory of knowledge needs to take account and acquire understanding. "Subjectivism," by contrast, is an outright denial of any normative force to realism; it is Protagorean relativism in its most literal interpretation. Objects are not permitted to impose checks upon understanding, or only the most minimal of checks are recognized, perhaps for reasons of expediency. Examples of such attitudes include the witch-hunting crazes of earlier centuries or the way people were branded Communists in the McCarthy era in America, as well as the perception of communism itself at that time. A classic case is the puzzled reaction in Viennese hospitals to the spread of puerperal fever and the resultant deaths. The reluctance to look for explanations in the doctors' conduct, the dismissal of any suggestion that the doctors' dirty hands might be a cause, the insistence that doctors *could not* be wrong, and the persecution of Semmelweiss, who knew otherwise, are manifestations of subjectivism in this case. There is minimal intellectual honesty here. It matters little how things are; what counts is how far one can bend them to one's own cognitive purposes.

"Objectivism," by contrast, involves keeping in touch, as closely as one can, with ordinary experience: being humble rather than haughty toward it and taking care not to impose theoretical structurings where the fit between theory and world is not as good as it could be. It includes acknowledging human fallibility and keeping "in reverent contact with that secular experience of the race . . . which is embodied in 'common sense', in the rules of 'good sense' and in the standards of 'tradition,'" ¹⁶ together with recognizing competent authority. Thus, urging Thomistic thinkers to guard against subjectivism, Aurel Kolnai writes, "Thomistic doctrine . . . is an eminent type of objectivistic thought. But no sooner do you raise the paragon above the Object itself than *your* thought takes on a basic character of subjectivism. For you

¹⁶ Aurel Kolnai's formulation in "The Sovereignty of the Object," in *Ethics, Value and Reality* (London: Athlone Press, 1977), p. 28. My discussion here owes a good deal to the position Kolnai formulates in this article.

have thus ceased to recognize the Object as the ultimate test, the 'measure' of your thought, and would have the Object 'measured' by the system."¹⁷ This shows respect for realistic cognitive practice and illustrates some of the dangers of ignoring its implications.

Indeed, objectivism and realism thus construed are virtually synonymous. Objectivism gives the object full reign. It is directed to and conditioned by the object, and it peruses reality rather than aiming, peremptorily, to conquer it. It is a mode of contemplation: something of a secularized Platonic knowing.¹⁸ Likewise, a realist respects the nature of the object while (in self-awareness) coming to know it as well as possible.

The alternative, subjectivism, seeks to conquer what it encounters in the world, aiming primarily to control rather than to understand. To this end, it applies ready-at-hand labels at the slightest indication that they must stick, without due consideration about whether they do, or ought to be made to, fit. Partial explanations are easy; they allow us to move readily about the world and to cope quite well at a superficial level. But they close off possibilities of understanding.

To enjoin objectivism is to enjoin sensitivity to subjectivistic attitudes both in oneself and, where it touches one, in others: vigilance against what is most usefully called "epistemic imperialism." In imperialistic cognitive practice a particular epistemic flag (a label or an explanation) is implanted upon a certain territory (a subject matter or an aspect of experience), thereby appropriating it summarily. It involves both a facile assumption that the complexity of experience can be captured in simplistic summings-up and an arrogant assumption that certain classificatory methods are plainly superior and applicable over too wide a variety of contexts.

Despite the pitfalls in such an imperialistic approach, it is important to achieve a "proper" degree of caring about what one

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁸ Kolnai puts it this way: "... all thought *proper*, even though biased, unilateral and subject-conditioned [the subjectivity] is directed to the object" (ibid., p. 26, my emphasis).

believes in.¹⁹ Clearly there is no virtue in shifting from belief to belief like a will o' the wisp, not bothered either way, waffling from one casually formulated expression of opinion to the next. Instead, beliefs and claims to knowledge must be constructed with care and reflection and adhered to because they matter. A balance needs to be maintained between dogmatism at one extreme, where cognitive agents cling to cherished beliefs and defend them against contradiction or refutation despite all evidence, and, at the other extreme, indifferent shifting to and fro. This balance between open-mindedness and dogmatism cannot be achieved by providing specific formulae or rigid classifications and distinctions, however. And it is a delicate balance, for it would be nonsensical to refuse to hold *any* belief just *in case* one might be guilty of dogmatism.²⁰

Dogmatism must be avoided because dogmatic positions generally lose sight of the need to make knowledge fit reality. By tenaciously holding to the view that *this* is the only way things could be, one eliminates the possibility of entertaining other evidence that undermines the (arbitrarily) privileged view. Examples abound where prejudice colors perceptions of other human beings individually, socially, or politically; and dogmatic positions are evident in the history of science, too. The cases of Gosse and of the Church Fathers against Galileo are apposite here.²¹ At one end of the spectrum of possible stances is the cava-

¹⁹ Peter Unger, for example, takes it as a given that it is *important* how one feels about one's knowledge or ignorance: these are not just neutral matters (see his *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975], p. 28 ff). But dogmatism has a distinctly *negative* moral tone. Caring about doxastic commitments is part of the theme of Annette Baier's "Caring about Caring: A Reply to Frankfurt," which I cited in chapter 2.

²⁰ Peirce, for example, attaches central importance to Bain's view that belief is "that upon which one is prepared to act." This is one reason why capricious chopping and changing is a sin parallel to dogmatism. One must, as the saying goes, be prepared to "put one's money where one's mouth is," at least for as long as the evidence allows it. (For a position where such action is a serious concomitant of any knowledge claim, see Brian Carr, "Knowledge and Its Risks," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 32 [1981–1982].)

²¹ This is, admittedly, an oversimplified characterization of the debate between Galileo and the Church Fathers. It might just as plausibly be argued that the latter were merely *short-sighted*. They were taking an attitude of responsibility to their institution and to their religious beliefs (stronger, presumably, than any

lier and careless decision to ignore or discount scientific discovery; at the other end, the dogmatism in holding that received scientific doctrine is the only esteem-worthy truth.

This discussion of dogmatism leads to difficult questions about the epistemic worth of ideology. One feels a certain qualified admiration for thinkers whose views form a system to which they themselves adhere steadfastly; but implicit in an adherence to any ideology is a danger closely akin to that of dogmatism. It would not be reasonable, for example, to follow the early Sartre in praising *engagement* per se in the faith that *engagement* will be in a worthy cause. Fascism, to take one clear example frequently counterposed to Sartre's views, *cannot* be judged as valuable from a moral point of view as are other, essentially humanitarian ideologies.

These observations are not applicable solely to the political realm. Both within intellectual disciplines and within experience of a more everyday kind, tightly fitting ideological spectacles give unacceptably distorted views of the world. They mitigate the normative claims of realism.²² A Freudian fundamentalist in psychoanalytic practice, for example, might conceivably be both less responsible, epistemically, and less effective as a practitioner if he or she refuses, on the basis of ideological commitment, to entertain other possible insights, such as the less reductivist views of the human psyche that more eclectic approaches can facilitate.²³ Similarly, feminists of excessive ideological fervor are

secular belief) that was normative with respect to other forms of knowledge. They needed to balance all sorts of responsibilities, ethical and institutional as well as epistemic. Nonetheless, one cannot ignore their failure to see, their abdication of normative realism. Had they been more long-sighted, they might have found ways to reconcile the two positions, just as Philip Gosse, too, might have done.

²² I shall discuss some specific examples of how this repudiation works in practice in chapter 9.

²³ I do not mean to suggest that Freud put forward a narrow view of human nature nor that to follow him is necessarily to be dogmatic. In a "Sketch of Freud's Life and Ideas," which appears as a preface to the Pelican edition of *Two Short Accounts of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962), James Strachey writes of Freud's "complete honesty and directness" and of his "intellectual readiness to take in and consider any fact, however new or extraordinary, that was presented to him" (p. 23). My point is to urge against granting his work Biblical status.

sometimes inclined to overlook the problems and virtues of men, fanatical Marxists may discount the possibility of other-than-materialist explanations and motivations for human conduct, and behaviorists are committed to impoverished views of what it is to be human.²⁴ There is a narrowing of vision in excessive ideological commitment, and the doctrine of the mean is the first casualty.

One might speculate that ideologies blind and constrain so much that to evaluate them (that is, either the ideologies *or* their adherents) as responsible or irresponsible is meaningless. People can only be held responsible in areas where there are clear choices, and ideologies often seem to preclude choice. But an ideology itself is most likely adopted by choice, so an individual is responsible for making that choice. Besides, there are ideological and quasi-ideological stances that can rightly be admired: those of Martin Luther for example, or Martin Luther King; so blame, too, would seem to be appropriate. The complex problem of how ideology *per se* should be evaluated is compounded, however, by the difficulty in finding a properly external vantage point from which such commitments can be assessed: an ideology of ideologies, a virtue of all virtues, so to speak. Every supposed vantage point runs the risk of judging from its own ideological viewpoint. The importance of being able to stand back even from one's most fervently held doxastic positions is apparent, but the difficulty of doing so must not be minimized.²⁵ This discussion points, then, to a central epistemic "ought": we ought to make use of our cognitive capacities so that we preserve and

²⁴ It might, in fact, be quite responsible for a behaviorist to pursue this line of thought, experimentally and theoretically, to find its boundaries. Irresponsibility comes in when findings are reported and interpreted as if there *were* no boundaries.

²⁵ *The God That Failed*, edited by Richard Crossman (New York: Bantam Books, 1952), is an important document about such a process in the lives of six thinkers initially converted to communism, later coming to reject it. In this case, the ideology is so clearly seductive on many levels, particularly at that time in history, that one is not inclined to condemn those seduced by it. The complexity in evaluating their situation in terms of *responsibility* is apparent when, alongside it, one considers the seductiveness of fascism at that same time. Criteria other than seductiveness are evidently required, and they must be of the moral rather than of the purely epistemic variety, despite the intellectual poverty of fascism in contrast to Marxism.

enhance our *freedom* to know.²⁶ Dogmatism is essentially a denial of that freedom.

Feyerabend's views are pertinent to these points. To his way of thinking, it is an epistemic imperative—indeed, *the* epistemic imperative—to avoid being blinded by methodology cast as ideology. Methodology necessarily obscures the complexity of the world; and scientific practice frequently fails to recognize this problem.²⁷ Now one need not endorse the air of anarchy that accompanies Feyerabend's rejection of traditions and standards to uphold its condemnation of rigidity, but the problem remains that Feyerabend's position can itself play the role of a blinding ideology.

In short, perspectival realism and a concomitant sensitivity to the temptations of dogmatism seem to be virtuous epistemic attitudes, both in knowledge seeking and in theory of knowledge. Yet this stance has self-referential implications, so vigilance is required lest it become a form of dogmatism in its own right. Part of what is entailed in normative realism is the need to be realistic about the limitations and pitfalls of one's own endeavors, even those carried out under its aegis.

Understanding

Knowledge of facts and knowledge of how to do things (Ryle's knowing that/knowing how) have received a good deal of epistemological attention. Claims to "know that . . ." are most commonly tested for correspondence and/or coherence, and claims to "know how to . . ." can often be substantiated in practice. But these two types of knowledge are neither exhaustive of the ways

²⁶ In the Galileo case, the Church Fathers were guilty of responsibility to a *limited* institution; and this loyalty led to a limitation of extra-institutional activities. To see them as guilty is again, though, to oversimplify what is at stake. Institutions are, in a sense, foundational to all human organization. The problem is to recognize this need while not allowing institutional power unjustifiably to restrict human projects or unjustifiably to require other, morally or epistemically reprehensible ones.

²⁷ Feyerabend insists, "The attempt to increase liberty, to lead a full and rewarding life, and the corresponding attempt to discover the secrets of nature and of man entails . . . the rejection of all universal standards and of all rigid traditions" (in *Against Method* [London: Verso Press, 1978], p. 20).

in which people know nor are they the most interesting manifestations of knowledge. In a sense, though, they are preconditions for a mode of knowing that eludes epistemological assessment: namely, understanding.

For two main reasons, one historical and one practical, the explication of understanding is philosophically vexed. In the history of philosophy, "understanding" is most frequently discussed as a faculty of the human mind. As such, it does not seem to be a process amenable to the sort of evaluation appropriate to cognitive endeavors. Sometimes, as in the title of Locke's *Essay*, "understanding" is used as a synonym for "mind" itself. In writings of the French Enlightenment²⁸ and in Kant and Hegel, the faculty of understanding is clearly an under-valued part of human cognitive apparatus: inferior to reason for Kant; less subtle than dialectic for Hegel; used to refer to operations of the mind that arise automatically from our impressions for Condillac.

I take understanding to be a process rather than a faculty, reserving judgment about whether or not it is prior to reason. It does seem to be true that one must understand something to reason about it, but recognition of this fact does not require ranking reason and understanding evaluatively nor granting one of the two absolute priority. One understands a little, then reasons a little, then understands a little more, and so on. The gradualness of cognitive process, and its reciprocity, is apparent here.

Practical problems in considering understanding to be a crucially important mode of knowing revolve primarily around the difficulties of establishing criteria for it. Criteria are also problematic for knowing how and knowing that, but there are touchstones, particularly if the answer need not be in terms of absolute certainty. We can see whether or not a person knows how to ride a bicycle; we can see, too, whether she can solve a problem in geometry, carry out an experiment in physics, translate a Latin sentence, follow a set of instructions, or play the piano. Even with fairly complex examples of knowing that (more com-

²⁸See, for example, Philip P. Hallie's article on Condillac in Vol. 2 of Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1967).

plex than knowing that this is a pen), it is often possible to see evidence of knowledge: to see that a person does in fact know the geography of Rhineland Germany, the theorems of Euclid, the principal dates and events of the French Revolution, the development of the plot of *Hamlet*.

Understanding is more complex. When I want to understand the issues at stake in an election so that I can vote wisely, I should seek advice from someone who knows *well*, someone who knows the facts pertinent to the situation and understands their interconnections and implications. Similarly, I am more likely to overcome a difficulty with geometry through instruction from someone, or from reading a book written by someone, who understands the subject beyond having learned the theorems. To apply theorems intelligently and well requires going beyond simply memorizing them; it requires being able to see patterns that make the theorem apposite in certain contexts. The same is true when I learn something for myself, without instruction or advice. I could learn enough geometry to pass an examination without understanding the subject more than quite superficially. Similarly, I could learn what happens in *Hamlet* (so that I could write a plot summary in a theater program) without understanding any of the truths about human nature that the play reveals. Knowing how (in the geometry case) and knowing that (in the *Hamlet* case) seem to be lesser degrees of knowing than understanding. Understanding is seemingly impossible, though, without first, or concomitantly, knowing how or knowing that (or both), as is appropriate to the subject matter. But it is in the manifestation of understanding that intellectual virtues make themselves most plainly apparent.

In chapter 3, I suggested that it might be difficult, and indeed unreasonable, to attribute intellectual virtue to a voracious collector of facts, such as Sartre's self-taught man or an information-gatherer of "encyclopedic" mind. I observed in this connection that it is, theoretically, possible to know everything yet understand nothing. Those who seem to know a great deal, having collected a great number of facts, yet who give no evidence of understanding these assembled items of information, of seeing their significance and interconnections, must still be regarded as

knowers. Except in a minimal sense, however, it is not possible to see such persons as intellectually virtuous. Knowing well is much more than accumulating facts.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to be precise about what counts as evidence of understanding. Consider a case where person A knows about the French Revolution (that is, knows the chronology of events), but one would plainly be better advised to consult B about it because B *understands* it so much better. Intuitively, there is little problem. We can all readily think of contexts where we proceed in this fashion. We have a notion that someone has a right sense of something—that we have a right sense that he has this right sense (a twofold possibility of error). The situation is thus as difficult to explicate as is the notion of understanding itself.

Partly, understanding has to do with what Socrates explores in introducing the kinship metaphor into the *Meno*, though mine is a somewhat different construal of the metaphor's implications than he perhaps intends. One lesson that might be drawn from a conception of the kinship of knowledge is that one can only properly be said to know (in my sense, not Plato's *episteme* sense) if one can comprehend the relation of this knowledge claim to its context and to a pattern of knowledge. Here, the ideal at the core of a holistic coherence theory is a governing factor. Analogously, at the end of the *Meno*, Socrates uses the example of the statues of Dedalus, which will run away if they are not tied down. The point seems to be that understanding involves tying one's knowledge down: relating it to a context, having some conception of the relation of this one "bit" of knowledge to the rest of what one knows. Think, for example, of how difficult it is to learn isolated words of a new language, how much easier it becomes once a sense of the workings of that language is acquired and words can be fitted into a structure. Understanding is a bit like having a sense of pattern, of a whole structure.²⁹

Understanding, then, involves a just apprehension of signifi-

²⁹ C. I. Lewis puts it this way: "Understanding is not a matter of the qualitative character of the given but of the anticipatory attitudes which it arouses. . . . [T]he validity of understanding does not concern the relation between experience and what is usually meant by the 'independent object'; it concerns the rela-

cance and endorses an ideal of seeing things "whole" in some sense. This characterization is somewhat paradoxical, given the unlikelihood of ever achieving perfect understanding, but seeing things "whole" is subtly different from seeing them completely, understanding them utterly. It has more to do with apprehending connectedness and significance. Indeed, one of the reasons understanding is so difficult and so neglected an epistemological concept may stem from its being always a matter of degree. Perfect understanding is impossible to imagine, even though we can all think of people whose depth of understanding we recognize and admire. Perhaps because of its lack of specifiable criteria and its unlikelihood ever of being fully illuminated, understanding is rarely discussed in accounts of human knowledge. Yet one line of epistemological thinking stands as a noteworthy exception. It occurs in Dilthey's thinking about the *Geisteswissenschaften*, it is evident in Wittgenstein, particularly in the post-Tractarian period, and it forms a central theme in the last section of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.³⁰

Understanding (*das Verstehen*) is, for Dilthey, the mode of cognition necessary for achieving knowledge in the *Geisteswissenschaften*. I think the *Verstehen* approach is more broadly applicable, and necessary, but in much the way he characterizes it. For Dilthey, procedures necessary for achieving knowledge in the natural sciences are central to achieving knowledge in the human sciences: observation, description, classification, quantification (where possible), induction and deduction, generalization, comparison, the use of models, and the framing and testing of hypotheses. But these procedures will never yield knowledge worthy of the name unless they are accompanied by, and performed with, understanding. To understand, in Dilthey's terms,

tion between this experience and *other* experiences which we seek to anticipate with this as a clue" (*Mind and the World Order*, pp. 164–65). This is understanding at a fairly common-sense, empirical level, but to insist upon its importance is, at the same time, to assert, *contra* Feyerabend, the need for a system of some sort.

³⁰ In claiming this to be a *line* of thought, I do not mean that Wittgenstein knew, and was influenced by, Dilthey's work. Certainly it is possible that this might have been so, but I have no evidence either way. Rorty's work is clearly influenced by Dilthey and, especially, by Wittgenstein, as he himself makes plain.

is to be deeply familiar with the terms of reference of a situation or subject matter: to know one's way about these terms much as one knows one's way about a city. To understand is to apprehend empathetically how human beings find meaning in their lives and to recognize certain phenomena, deeds, and events as expressions of meaning. It involves an ability to comprehend meaning thus expressed: to know, more or less without being told, what a certain situation means to these persons and to recognize aspects of it as indicative of that meaning.

I think the concerns of the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* are less disparate than Dilthey suggests. The fact that the universe is heliocentric rather than geocentric may not, in itself, be meaningful (that is, independently of human—or other—observers who find it so). But the debate between Galileo and the Church Fathers indicates that such a fact can gain admittance to the realm of human knowledge only if its meanings (in this case, in terms of God's purposes for humankind) can be rendered palatable to human thought. The creationist/evolutionist debate is analogous. The history of natural science is as fraught with the need to make experience meaningful—hence to understand it—as is the history of the human sciences.³¹ This similarity, however, offers no support to claims that the appropriate methodology for the study of humanity is the methodology of natural science.

Understanding, then, has a good deal to do with apprehension of meaning³²—of the significance of a particular part of

³¹ In *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), Collingwood shows how the history of science is shaped by evolving conceptions of meaning.

³² Hannah Arendt in Volume I: *Thinking of The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, 1978) conceives of *thinking* in the best sense, very much as I have just characterized understanding. (She uses the term "thinking" rather than "understanding" to distinguish what she is talking about from the Kantian construal of understanding as a faculty of the mind: *Verstand*.) She distinguishes traditional (and modern scientific) forms of knowing, which strive to *grasp* what is given to the senses, from thinking, which wants to understand its meaning (cf. p. 57). This kind of thinking can be judged *qualitatively*, but not in terms of a two-valued logic. The basic goal of science is to see and know the world of common sense: to seek irrefutable truths to dispel error and illusion. The quest for meaning, however, calls upon another kind of sense whose function is "to fit us into the world of appearances and make us at home in the world given by our five senses" (p. 58). Arendt finds a close connection between such thinking and intellectual and moral virtue.

knowledge within a larger, growing, and changing scheme of things—and with a generalized sort of familiarity with the world and the “state of the art” that makes this apprehension possible. Wittgenstein, too, in *Philosophical Investigations* and in *Zettel*, devotes considerable attention to understanding as it is manifested in language and in cognitive activity.³³ In connection with the problem of criteria, it is worth noting that his observations are guided by questions about *how* certain things are understood, as opposed to whether or not they are understood. He does not question whether we can understand completely or if we can understand at all, rather, he ponders the extent, degree, and manner of understanding and the quests for criteria to discern its achievement. Understanding is not a matter of applying truth tables but of determining appropriate “fit,” of achieving a sense of coherence and rightness that is crucially dependent upon context.³⁴

It often seems that Wittgenstein, in exploring the notion of understanding, is primarily concerned to unravel what is involved in understanding the meaning of a word. But understanding a single word is at least as mysterious and puzzling a phenomenon as understanding the complex of words that comprise the plot of *Hamlet*. It provides a microcosmic example for seemingly loftier instances where we need to understand understanding. We take understanding language so thoroughly for granted that we tend to lose sight of the amazing fact of it.³⁵

Wittgenstein evidently intends his applications of understanding language to cover understanding in action as well, though it is not clear whether the action itself is the understanding (for example in understanding and carrying out an order)³⁶ whether

³³ One could read the *Tractatus*, too, (not just post-Tractarian Wittgenstein, as I suggest above), particularly its last sections, as saying that what we can *know*, in a “knowing that” sense, has now been stated. Beyond that, there is all that we understand, which is simply not amenable (that is, not reducible) to this kind of analysis. Therefore we must be silent: we cannot speak of it in this way.

³⁴ cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, § 6.

³⁵ As Putnam points out in his discussion of Tarski's theory of truth, “The problem is not that we don't understand ‘Snow is white’; the problem is that we don't understand *what it is to understand* ‘Snow is white’. This is the philosophical problem” (*Reason, Truth and History*, p. 129).

³⁶ *Philosophical Investigations*, § 431.

the understanding occurs in hearing an order, or whether it mysteriously fills a gulf between an order and its execution. Certainly he does not want to allow that there could be a kind of “inner process” that must be isolated and analyzed if we are to see what understanding is.³⁷

Wittgenstein’s denial of the possibility that there could be inner processes is somewhat problematic despite the awkwardness of claims that there *are* such processes.³⁸ We seem to be able to inspect our own perceptual experiences: at least Edmund Wright does a persuasive job of arguing for this ability with respect to after-images.³⁹ Wright describes the after-image that appears after he has looked at the sun: a “small livid patch of a purplish tinge . . . [on] an unevenly red background” and goes on to recount an imaginative play with this image, making a boat sail around it, putting a sailor on board, turning the red patch into clouds. It is difficult to see how one could challenge the fact of his experience or deny that he is describing an inner process. The example suggests conclusions applicable both to perceptual imagery and to cognitive processes more generally. The fact that we usually do not engage in such imaginative play, except when we are concentrating upon a perceptual process in an effort to understand it, provides no reason to deny that we *can* do it. We can also look back over our processes of coming to know or of coming to understand and often, if not always, see when (if perhaps not precisely *how*) we began to understand or to have a glimmer of knowledge.

Perhaps one could partially concede Wittgenstein’s point, and acknowledge that assessing our own understanding is something we do less well alone than in company. Some of the best evidence I can have that I do, in fact, understand comes from conversational uptake, and from situations where other people clearly

³⁷ Ibid., § 321.

³⁸ Wittgenstein claims (ibid., § 396) that it is not essential to the understanding of a proposition that one imagine anything in connection with it. This may be so, but imagining is not the only mental operation (that is, inner process) one might perform in connection with understanding. Nor does the claim that imagining is not essential to *all* understanding imply that it might not be essential to *some*.

³⁹ See Edmund Wright, “Perception: A New Theory,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, No. 4 (October 1977), p. 274.

find my understanding adequate. It is not the only evidence, though. Something like an “aha!” response—a feeling of change, of being enlightened—is just as important as other persons’ perceptions of one’s behavior. Given the complexity of this process, there is no good reason to assume that it should have a simple explanation, in terms either of behavioral criteria or of internal processes.

Wittgenstein intends his explications to be pertinent to both a broad and a narrow sense of understanding. For example, he declares⁴⁰ that the concept must encompass both understanding a sentence, so that one can replace it with another sentence, and understanding the sentence in the sense that one cannot replace it. He takes the latter to be like understanding a poem or a musical theme. “Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think,” he writes.⁴¹ The general thrust of the observations in the *Philosophical Investigations* leads one to suspect that, for Wittgenstein, understanding a musical theme is much closer to being a paradigm of understanding (if he would/could allow paradigms) than is understanding the meaning of a word. The process is essentially mysterious, puzzling.⁴² Despite his disavowal, it seems to involve something inner, for it is difficult to see what could be a behavioral criterion of understanding a poem or a musical theme. The problem, as Wittgenstein is fully aware, is that one can only offer explanations in the form of comparisons, analogies. But analogies to what? Some sort of inner process seems to be required to link the two sides of the analogy. Furthermore, like poems and musical themes, signs and gestures, too, are ambiguous.⁴³ It is difficult to see what could be the token by which we in fact understand (or by which we are aware of ambiguity and wrestle

⁴⁰ *Philosophical Investigations*, § 531–32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, § 527.

⁴² Thus, for example, in *Zettel* (ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970]) he writes: “In many cases we might set it up as a criterion of understanding, that one had to be able to represent the sense of a sentence in a drawing (I am thinking of an officially instituted test of understanding). How is one examined in map-reading, for example?” (§ 245). Clearly the matter of specifying criteria is problematic.

⁴³ cf., *Philosophical Investigations*, § 433.

with it). Even clearly behavioral criteria for the existence of understanding are no less problematic. Being able to “go on” to complete an open-ended, patterned series of numbers, a series of shapes or colors, or an ornamental pattern that, for Wittgenstein, count as evidence of understanding are behavioral criteria of this sort.⁴⁴ The fact that they are in part behavioral does not explain the “curious sense” in which the understanding evidenced seems to “reach beyond all examples.”⁴⁵

Wittgenstein’s reflections on the problem of understanding relate to my thesis in this way: In my view, understanding is a primary epistemological concept, just as important as knowing (how *or* that) and believing. It is at least as much on the basis of evident understanding as it is in consequence of a good record of valid knowledge claims and justified beliefs that a person is judged intellectually virtuous. Yet if Wittgenstein’s observations are to be treated with the respect they clearly deserve, we are faced with a foundationless, criterionless, essentially puzzling *something* on the basis of which to judge this manifestation of intellectual character.⁴⁶

It is foundationless as long as understanding is considered to be a *product* no different in kind from claims to know that, or to know how, and is judged in isolation from human endeavors to understand the world as well as possible. For understanding, there can indeed be no foundations of an incontrovertible, absolute variety. There can, however, be standards of a sort, in terms of which understanding can be acknowledged and assessed: in “forms of life,” to use Wittgenstein’s phrase, in “the conversation of mankind,” to use Richard Rorty’s. These standards are better seen as working criteria, analogous to working hypotheses, but this description downgrades them neither in terms of efficacy

⁴⁴ Ibid., § 208–11.

⁴⁵ Ibid., § 232.

⁴⁶ Wittgenstein observes, “How curious: we should like to explain our understanding of a gesture by means of a translation into words, and the understanding of words by translating them into a gesture. (Thus we are tossed to and fro when we try to find out where understanding properly resides.)” (*Zettel*, § 227.)

nor of purity. They are as efficacious as a circumspect and critical thinker can wish. Their efficacy is particularly apparent if we read (or amend) Rorty's account, as Richard Bernstein thinks we must,⁴⁷ so that we allow for a constant, critical ear to be attuned to the conversation of humankind.

Purity is, in any event, a misleading ideal. It can only be striven for by abstracting cognitive activity from circumstances in which it necessarily takes place. Neither forms of life nor conversations are isolated entities, wholly incommensurable with one another. They can be evaluated and criticized both from within and from without. An implicit realism will guide the best of this type of criticism—indeed, there is no other guide.

The notion of foundationless criteria would not trouble a philosopher like Richard Rorty, who sees epistemology's centuries-long quest for foundations and theories of knowledge to be both misbegotten and futile. It would be wrong, though, in agreeing with him on this point, to reject the possibility of studying knowledge, of recognizing it to be a puzzle, and of attempting to offer descriptions in the form of provisional explanations. Such explanations can make the phenomenon of knowledge less mystifying, even if they can never present solutions. In short, I think Rorty is wrong to argue that, because the kind of epistemology long aspired for is, according to him, not a feasible goal, therefore theory of knowledge should be eradicated as a so-called discipline. Descriptive, evaluative explication of human efforts to understand and know the world retains a vital role in philosophy. One possible role of an (in Rorty's phrase) "enlightening philosophy" and of *Bildung* as a goal of enquiry is to develop such explications.

Although "conversation" might always be tentative, provisional, and inconclusive, this fact does not mean that all its results, in terms of which people act, are of equal value either from an epistemic or from an ethical point of view. Indeed, Rorty seems obliged to endorse many of the goals I advocate here, as his argument moves toward his own position elaborated in Part 3

⁴⁷ See Richard J. Bernstein, "Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind," *Review of Metaphysics* 33, No. 4 (June 1980).

of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.⁴⁸ He writes, for example, of a view common to Dewey and Wittgenstein “that a natural quest for understanding has been run together, by modern philosophers, with an unnatural quest for certainty.”⁴⁹ This quest for understanding is something he unreservedly applauds, while eschewing any quest for certainty. Still, Rorty insists that theory of knowledge (by which he means *foundational* epistemology) is dead and that he is not “putting hermeneutics forward as a ‘successor subject’ to epistemology.”⁵⁰ This stance is laudable if he means that he does not offer hermeneutics as an alternative means of doing exactly what traditional epistemology set out to do. If he means, though, that once traditional epistemology has been declared a failure we must abandon all efforts to *understand* (even though we acknowledge that all understanding falls far short of perfection), then he cannot be right.

It makes good sense to allow that there are more and less responsible forms of discourse, both morally and epistemically speaking, within the conversation of humankind. But this acknowledgement does not entail the further assumption, which Rorty properly dismisses as erroneous, that “all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable” and that there can exist “a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached . . . [when] statements seem to conflict,” to use Rorty’s phrases.⁵¹ The choice is not between sets of rules or no understanding at all, between complete commensurability or conversational anarchy, either within the conversation of humankind itself or in the evaluative conversation of philosophy, which aims

⁴⁸ It is worth noting that Rorty uses the term “epistemic responsibility” in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 246. In his usage, however, it is much less rich, its scope much narrower than I mean it to be. He uses it to mean “the organism’s being justified in believing this or that.” His meaning seems simply to be an alternative way of referring to standard conditions of justification rather than a way of bringing ideals of good knowing into philosophical focus.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228. There is a minor problem here with the notion that the latter quest is “unnatural.” The *yearning* for certainty is surely among the most natural of human yearnings. The point seems to be that thoughtful, insightful human beings should realize the futility of transforming this yearning into the guiding quest of philosophical enquiry.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

at understanding the nature of other, specific conversations. Even with no explicit, codified rules to guide it, consensus of the sort Rorty himself refers to⁵² can be achieved and submitted to critical scrutiny. Rorty is prepared to allow room in his behavioristic, hermeneutical scheme for discussions of objectivity: he merely rules out Objectivity. As he construes it, objective truth ("the best idea we currently have about how to explain what is going on")⁵³ goes a considerable way toward according realism normative force. It all depends on how we read "best idea" and "explain."

These terms ("best idea" and "explain"), as Rorty uses them, can be read in a manner reminiscent of Collingwood's *Essay on Metaphysics*, where the goal of philosophy is characterized as that of producing a historical account of the inner structure of the thought of past philosophers. A philosopher/historian strives to think his or her way into a question-and-answer process, which gives rise to doctrines such as Plato's theory of the forms. Philosophy according to Collingwood does nothing more than *record* absolute presuppositions, which are at the bottom of every such process; a philosopher is a highly specialized historian. There is a valuable insight here, as I have argued elsewhere.⁵⁴ One is more likely to see the point, for Plato *and* for us, of thinking in terms of pure forms if one is able to fathom the origins of Plato's thought. It is, at any rate, more satisfying than treating him like a participant in a twentieth-century philosophical debate. Collingwood is surely mistaken though to think that philosophy's business is merely to record and that all so-called absolute presuppositions are equally worthy. Nor does he, in practice, act according to this belief. Clearly, he considers some absolute presuppositions about causality to be simply mistaken. He is particularly critical of the view of causality prevalent during what he calls "the Kantian period, roughly from Kant to Einstein."⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., p. 321.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 385.

⁵⁴ See my "The Importance of Historicism for a Theory of Knowledge," and "Collingwood: A Philosopher of Ambiguity," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3, No. 1 (January 1986).

⁵⁵ See R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Chicago: Gateway Edition, 1972), p. 333.

Rorty's work is reminiscent of Collingwood's in his view that "explaining what is going on" is the task of hermeneutics. He would not contend that such explanation will unearth absolute presuppositions: if it did, they would have to be seen as unwarranted and would be expunged. But explanation as Rorty conceives it needs to be expanded to include evaluation, as it does in practice for Collingwood. If he does not conceive of evaluation as part of the philosophical project, then Rorty is urging philosophers to neglect their most important task. As Bernstein admirably puts the point: "There are plenty of questions concerning justification, objectivity, the scope of disciplines, the proper way of distinguishing rational from irrational discussants, and *praxis* that are answerable and demand our attention—even when we concede that any answers are themselves subject to historical limitations."⁵⁶ Interim, tentative, but honest results are good in their own right; they are realistic and responsible.

Rorty begins to address questions such as these in his "Reply to Dreyfus and Taylor,"⁵⁷ where he characterizes his hermeneutical approach as a "universal willingness to view inquiry as muddling through, rather than conforming to canons of rationality—coping with people and things rather than corresponding to reality by discovering essences."⁵⁸ A view such as this should allow room for the kinds of questions that, with Bernstein, I find important. Particular procedures can be commended or faulted on the extent to which they preserve a willingness to be thus characterized. A mode of enquiry can be commended for the realism that guides its concern with people and events; it can be criticized for blocking its own efforts with an insistence that discovery of essences is the only proper philosophical result. In short, there is room in Rorty's position for commending and/or

⁵⁶Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 775. Bernstein allows that Rorty in fact *suggests* that these questions should be addressed; the problem, and the thrust of Bernstein's criticism of this work which he much admires, is that Rorty does not grapple with these important issues.

⁵⁷Richard Rorty, "Reply to Dreyfus and Taylor," *Review of Metaphysics* 34, No. 1 (September 1980). His reply is to Hubert I. Dreyfus' "Holism and Hermeneutics" and to Charles Taylor's "Understanding in Human Science," both in this same issue of the *Review of Metaphysics*.

⁵⁸Rorty, *ibid.*, p. 38.

criticizing projects of enquiry on the basis of openness, realism, responsibility, or lack thereof. Both philosophy itself, and the disciplines it evaluates, can profitably be judged on these terms.

The *Lebenswelt*: Cognitive Practice

Implicit in normative realism is the view that to be a good knower is to have a fundamental respect for truth. A good knower seeks to achieve knowledge that fits the world of experience, is coherent with rationally established truths, and enables one to live well, both epistemically and morally. It is a central tenet of this view that many truths are knowable, even if there is no single, isolated Truth. Those ideals of good knowing worthy of preservation in traditional theories of truth and knowledge are about achieving the truest possible picture of the world.

In elaborating a normative sense of realism, I do not contend that there are levels or degrees of reality, some more real than others and so amenable to better kinds of explanatory accounts. This prejudice underlies “scientism,” according to which only science can offer a true account of reality and all other modes of explanation deal with a lesser order: appearances. Elementary particles are not *more real* than tables and chairs; rather, descriptions of the molecular structures of physical objects provide one way of understanding tables and chairs relevant to a specific set of epistemic purposes. The study of human efforts to understand, make sense of, and converse about experience is properly conducted with reference to the *Lebenswelt*⁵⁹ in which human beings do in fact live, know, and have experiences.⁶⁰

Clearly there is a difference between a physicist’s explanation of what a physical object is and the way I experience the object—for example, a pottery jar. It would be a mistake, though, to consider the experienced jar to be *merely* a jar of appearance, the jar

⁵⁹ This insistence is implicit, too, in Rorty’s book.

⁶⁰ Arendt thus considers it a mistake to equate a quest for understanding with the scientific quest for knowledge (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 121). For the latter, there can only be one truth: it must “follow a rectilinear motion, starting from the quest for its object and ending with cognition of it” (p. 124). For a quest for understanding guided by a realism capable of granting space to many perspectives, there are no such artificial restrictions.

described using particles and forces the *real* jar, therefore leaving the evaluative implication that the latter is better in the sense of being a truer rendering of what the jar really is. Hilary Putnam's point is worth noting here: "Today we tend to be too realistic about physics and too subjectivistic about ethics. . . . It is *because* we are too realistic about physics, because we see physics (or some hypothetical future physics) as the One True Theory, and not simply as a rationally acceptable description suited for certain problems and purposes, that we tend to be subjectivistic about descriptions we cannot 'reduce' to physics."⁶¹ The molecular structure of the jar does explain some of the ways in which it is experienced. It may indicate why a jar of this sort of material is better for certain purposes than one of another sort, or why it will break rather than bounce when it is dropped. But the jar I experience is just as real as the one described in the language of physics, and more significant, in fact, to my experience. My perception and understanding of its shape and substance may differ significantly from those of an interior decorator, an archaeologist, or simply a lover of well-crafted objects. All these ways of knowing an object are dependent upon how it works in experience: they produce the kinds of truth compatible with the spirit (if not the letter) of pragmatism. Yet it would be difficult to justify taking any one of them as the Truth about that object.

Similar considerations apply to modes of explanation of all aspects of experience—from products of advanced technology or expert craftsmanship, to how things were in history, to what the Sahara Desert is like, to what other people are like, to how well we know ourselves. No one mode of explanation is more privileged than any other in the sense of being more closely in touch with reality (whatever "reality" is understood to mean). Thus Rorty, commenting upon attempts to pinpoint the "essence of man," declares one value of the existentialist view to be that "by proclaiming that we have no essence, it permits us to see the description of ourselves we find in one of (or in the unity of) the *Naturwissenschaften* as on a par with the various alternative descriptions offered by poets, novelists, depth psychologists, sculp-

⁶¹ *Reason, Truth and History*, p. 143.

tors, anthropologists, and mystics. The former are not privileged representations in virtue of the fact that (at the moment) there is more consensus in the sciences than in the arts.”⁶² These points apply, analogously, over the entire range of our efforts to explain experience. Presumably, depth psychologists and mystics are not primarily interested in studying volcanic activity, for example (though they might draw some analogies from what they know of it to their own more specialized pursuits). The importance of Rorty’s point in this connection, though, is in its emphasis upon the unignorable complexity of the world we experience in our search for explanations. Only by yielding to an ever-present temptation to “underdescribe” cases of knowing can one seriously claim that scientistic, foundationalist, or coherentist theories of knowledge offer complete, adequate accounts of human efforts to cope intelligibly in the *Lebenswelt*, where the conversation of humankind, for the most part, takes place.⁶³

In my discussion of the Gosse case, I maintained that concentration upon end states of cognition, upon knowledge or belief claims as independent entities, restricts one to a small part of an intricate problem. Neither as knowledge seekers nor in any other activity are human beings merely observers of the world. First, and most importantly, we belong in the world and are part of it. Our observations presuppose this participation. However objective and neutral we may try to be, this is a fact we cannot escape.⁶⁴ I am claiming that it is by no means desirable to try to escape it. Our explanations and understanding would not be truer, better, or more adequate if we could stand outside the world.

Philosophers persistently struggle to bring philosophically respectable theories of knowledge into plausible contact with the actual experiences of knowledge seekers. The result is often, as Wittgenstein puts it with reference to psychology, that we seem

⁶² *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 362.

⁶³ Such “underdescription” is yet another form of epistemic imperialism: propose a neat formula and use it to sum up, to conquer, a complex situation.

⁶⁴ See, in this context, Thomas Nagel’s excellent papers, “Subjective and Objective” and “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

to have only “experimental methods and *conceptual confusion*.”⁶⁵ He adds, “The existence of the experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and method pass one another by.”⁶⁶ The problem for psychology, where the real person eludes the kinds of explanation experimental psychology can offer, is equally a problem for efforts to understand knowing, believing, and understanding. There is a limit to the usefulness of injunctions to go beyond appearances in search of certainty, whether by embarking upon quasi-Cartesian quests for indubitable knowledge or by employing positivistic or neo-positivistic verificationist (or falsificationist) methodologies. Having performed the operations such methodologies enjoin, we still remain puzzled, troubled.⁶⁷

Many questions that *look* like empirical questions, that look as if we could answer them by accumulating information, remain as puzzling as they initially were even after all of the available information has been assembled. We still do not understand. In Frank Cioffi’s vivid imagery, the error is in “thinking that when I ask why I am impressed, I am asking the same kind of question as when I ask why I am bilious, only about my mind instead of my body; of failing to see the difference between ‘What is it that I am feeling?’ and ‘What is it that I am sitting on?’”⁶⁸ The problem is compounded by the fact that it seems to be impossible simply to propose another, alternative but similar kind of method, more appropriate to this kind of puzzle. There really *is* no method for achieving realistic understanding of the mysteries we constantly encounter and live through in the *Lebenswelt*. There is simply (but really not so *simply*) reflection, conversation,

⁶⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 232.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Frank Cioffi observes, “Our reflections on such matters don’t always find their natural consummation in the discovery of causal relations. . . . What we want with respect to certain phenomena are not their causes, but their bearings. The lack of closure, the feeling of unfinished business that we experience with respect to them is not always a matter of factual ignorance, to be relieved by the discovery of causal relations” (in “When Do Empirical Methods Bypass ‘The Problems Which Trouble Us?’” in *Philosophy and Literature*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series 16, ed. A. Phillips Griffiths [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984]).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

partial explanation, evocation, with no book of rules to indicate when any of these tasks has been done properly and certainly no suggestion that results can ever be conclusive, the explanation complete. There is only better and worse understanding, according to the rightness of one's sense of the situation. Conceptual errors are not quite like empirical (or numerical) errors.

The appropriate epistemological question, then, when epistemology is construed as a quest for understanding, becomes not "What can I know?" but "What sort(s) of discourse does the situation really call for?"—an important question to pose and answer well, both for human cognition *per se* and for philosophical attempts to explicate such cognition. It is appropriate to take seriously Wittgenstein's warning against

. . . wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas the solution of the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. If we dwell upon it, and do not try to get beyond it.

The difficulty here is: to stop.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Zettel*, § 314.

CHAPTER 7

Epistemic Community

Community and Commonability

Human beings, who are the agents in moral theory and the knowledge seekers in theory of knowledge, are curiously different creatures in each domain of enquiry. Moral theory, with the possible exception of Hobbesian-type approaches, starts from the assumption that human beings are social beings. Theories differ as to whether they are social by nature, whether it is a matter of human essence, or whether people are necessarily, unavoidably social, but the central assumption persists. Moral theory is as much concerned with modes of human interaction as it is with individual human efforts to achieve a good life. And Hobbes is only an apparent exception. The need to arrange human interaction to avoid a *bellum omnium contra omnes* clearly arises from the assumption that coexistence, in some sense, is a basic, if undesirable necessity.¹ Even the achievement of self-respect needs spelling out in terms of how one views oneself vis-

¹For moral theory, the quality of human interaction is of central concern, even though much of moral theory is autonomy oriented and defensive about compromising that autonomy. Often, putatively interactive human beings are conceived of as separate, atomistic creatures for whom interaction is an unhappy necessity. Rarely is there any suggestion that it might be a fundamental good, whose best manifestations, in mutuality, are to be fostered. Feminist moral theorists, in particular, are now developing sustained and thoughtful challenges to these assumptions. For my own contributions to this project, see "Simple Equality Is Not Enough," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 64, Suppl. (June 1986); and "Second Persons," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

à-vis others as much as in terms of one's inward thoughts, responses, and attitudes.

Epistemology starts with what amounts to a denial of these assumptions. The knowledge seeker is conceived of as a solitary being: from Plato's insistence upon the incommunicability of knowledge of the Forms, through Descartes' individualistic program for achieving certainty, to Russell's emphasis upon the primacy of knowledge by acquaintance. Not only are human beings taken to be independent in cognitive endeavors, but it is contended that cognitive independence is a desirable condition. The underlying assumption is that even knowledge that might, for one knower, be quite *good* knowledge must inevitably be diluted, denatured, or reduced to opinion when it is conveyed to, or acquired from, another person. Testimony is commonly taken to be of a lesser order than knowledge at first hand, and a poor substitute for it.

Epistemology has much to gain from exploring affinities between ethical and epistemological reasoning. If human moral agents are taken implicitly to have a different kind of existence from human epistemic agents, however, analogies between these two modes of thought are less readily discernible.

In my view, human beings are social creatures as much in knowledge seeking as in moral activity. Human beings are cognitively interdependent in a fundamental sense, and knowledge is, essentially, a *commonable* commodity.² In this chapter, I shall elaborate some of the reasons for this interdependence and some of its implications for understanding human cognition.

One such implication has been discussed in chapter 5: namely, that the knowledge-seeking process and its product are inextricably linked. Knowledge is a human creation that can only be as good as the efforts that go into creating it. Epistemology needs to give as much attention to the attitudes and endeavors of

²Michael Welbourne uses this term in "Knowing and Believing," *Philosophy* 55 (1980), and in "The Community of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1981). In the example from John Hardwig's paper, "Epistemic Dependence" (cited on page 54), the scientists are totally dependent upon one another: those performing one part of an experiment may not even understand the work done by those performing a separate part.

would-be knowers as to knowledge per se. I have argued, too, for the need to shake off a persistent preoccupation with propositions: with evaluating *sentences* where the verb “to know” and its equivalents occur. Instead, epistemologists should focus upon cognitive practice in order properly to understand what underlies such verbal usage.

Many propositions, such as “This is a hand,” “I think, therefore I am,” “This is green,” often taken to be paradigmatic knowledge claims, are so simple one hardly needs to work at formulating them; nor is the knowledge of the sort one would ordinarily seek to acquire cooperatively. Yet to grant them paradigmatic status points to the mistaken conclusion that all proper knowledge claims will be like these claims, both in their simplicity and in their ease of solitary attainment. Consequently, it does not seem either that knowledge can be shared or that one has to be part of an epistemic community to acquire knowledge.

When we look at cognitive practice, it is clear, at least from the genetic point of view, that one of the most important ways in which people come to know is by learning from others. This point is not merely about cognitive development—about the genesis and growth of knowledge in childhood—though if knowledge could *not* be acquired from others we would most likely not be here to tell about it, for we would not have heeded our parents’ warnings about mortal dangers. Acquiring knowledge from other people pervades cognitive life from childhood learning about the immediate environment, through history, geography, and biology learned in school, to facts one comes to know every day, both about coping with the world and about esoteric, technical domains of professional life.

Individualistic, self-sufficiency-oriented epistemology, “[i]f taken as a historical or genetic account of the way in which we acquire our knowledge . . . utterly fails to recognize the extent to which we are cognitively members of one another.”³ Now a genetic account of knowledge acquisition cannot, without committing the genetic fallacy, offer a complete account and/or justifica-

³This is Antony Quinton’s observation in “Authority and Autonomy in Knowledge,” in *Thoughts and Thinkers* (London: Duckworth, 1982), p. 66.

tion of the nature and conditions of human knowledge; but it does bring to light certain fundamental conditions of knowledge as such. Early childhood knowledge acquisition gives some indication of the scope of cognitive interdependence, and it would be a mistake to think that interdependence ends with childhood, that mature cognitive agents are recognizable by achieved autonomy. Childhood teaches us how to be interdependent. To entertain the illusion that, in adulthood, one leaves this interdependence entirely behind is to discount much of one's everyday cognitive experience.

In adult life, it would be absurd to refuse to take knowledge claims seriously unless they are based upon experience at first hand: that is, unless the person has tasted the substances declared poisonous for herself, located the North Pole, been present at the battle of Waterloo, redone the chemical or psychological tests upon which the next stage of his research is based. In principle, the individualistic tradition demands such first hand experience of people who want to claim knowledge rather than simply to state opinion. Yet these experiences are the kinds of things people learn about from others. In many such cases, learning from others (teachers, textbooks, documents, colleagues, "experts") is the only way one *can* ever know; and I use the word "can" with its strongest force.⁴ Although it could be argued that it is logically possible to know most of these things on one's own, I am concerned here with practical possibilities.

Shared knowledge of this sort is standardly covered by the term "testimony," a term that tends to obscure cognitive interdependence by virtue of "over-intellectualiz[ing] the relationship in question."⁵ This connotation, I suspect, has not a little to do with its persistent courtroom associations, and particularly with the model of knowledge implicit in courtroom procedure.

⁴Thus Bertrand Russell observes: "I know of the existence of my friend Mr. Jones because I see him frequently: in his presence I know him by perception, and in his absence by memory. I know of the existence of Napoleon because I have heard and read about him, and I have every reason to believe in the veracity of my teachers" (in *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* [London: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1948], p. 180).

⁵This is Quinton's phrase, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

In such procedures it tends to be assumed that there are clear, distinct, atomic facts to be discovered, which speak unequivocally for themselves. When considered thus, testimony becomes a small, and relatively esoteric, part of human cognitive endeavor. Its legal associations may well obscure its ubiquity in cognitive life. Yet even the basic instruments of criticism, communication, and control that are necessary to achieve any degree of cognitive independence are acquired out of a deeply authoritative tradition. Among these instruments are an observation language, a logic, and a simple investigative methodology, fundamental to cognitive activity.⁶ Once one recognizes their import, both the possibility and the desirability of cognitive independence can be seen as highly questionable.

An interesting example will clarify this point. Alasdair MacIntyre draws attention to Descartes' lack of success in building a purely autonomous epistemology, despite his strenuous efforts to do so. More importantly (because it is more readily overlooked), he describes Descartes' failure genuinely to have found a presuppositionless, properly independent beginning, despite his avowed intentions. MacIntyre's observation is worth quoting at length:

First of all he does not recognize that among the features of the universe which he is not putting in doubt is his own capacity not only to use the French and Latin languages, but even to express the same thought in both languages; and as a consequence he does not put in doubt what he has inherited in and with these languages, namely, a way of ordering both thought and the world expressed in a set of meanings. . . . [H]e did not notice either what Gilson pointed out in detail, how much of what he took to be the spontaneous reflection of his own mind was in fact a repetition of sentences and phrases from his school textbooks. . . . What goes unrecognised by Descartes is the presence not only of languages, but of a tradition—a tradition he took himself to have successfully disowned.⁷

⁶ As Quinton points out, ". . . external authority is the original source not only of items of information . . . but also of language, logic and method, the indispensable means for the formulation and critical assessment of our beliefs" *ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," p. 458.

Even the most determined and distinguished proponent of epistemological individualism seems to have failed significantly in the most crucial step of his program.

The case of the wolf boy of Aveyron, mentioned in chapter 3, illustrates another aspect of a knowledge seeker's vital dependence upon epistemic community. Clearly the boy has knowledge of the world: he knows a good deal about what wolves know. Yet he knows very little, if anything, of what an average human being knows. His ignorance cannot be explained by saying that the world is not there for him to experience and know. Furthermore, despite the importance of verbal communication in knowledge acquisition, it cannot adequately be explained by his not having human language. Language is just one of the many "essential arts of personhood"⁸ he has failed to acquire by being deprived of "normal" dependence upon other human beings. The most important factor in accounting for his knowledge or ignorance, then, is that he has had no access to a human community of knowers. He lacks language not because of lack of intelligence, but because of his isolation from other human beings.

This community of knowledge, this tradition from which Descartes could not wholly extricate himself despite his best efforts and to which the wolf boy had no access, is created, enlarged, and cemented by transmitting and receiving knowledge. The process is reciprocal: cognitive commonability is dependent for its existence upon community, which, in turn, is sustained by commonability. In fact, for something to *count* as an item of knowledge, it must be possible for at least some members of an epistemic community to locate it within the context of what one might call a "communication system." There must be a coherent, if loosely constructed and open-ended, shared, or shareable way of referring to, talking about, or symbolizing that item, showing its connections with existing knowledge. (This idea is central to

⁸The phrase is Annette Baier's in "Cartesian Persons" (in her *Posture of the Mind*). Baier observes, "A person, perhaps, is best seen as one who was long enough dependent upon other persons to acquire the essential arts of personhood. Persons essentially are *second* persons, who grow up with other persons" (p. 84).

Wittgenstein's "private language" argument.) Such a communication system can develop *only* through cognitive interaction, just as human knowers themselves come to *be* knowers in a reciprocal process of interaction with other knowers and with the world.⁹

Cognitive Interdependence and Trust

One of the most significant aspects of being a member of a community of knowledge is that one can, as a matter of course, draw upon a reservoir of largely unarticulated assumptions about other people's knowledge. In most of our everyday cognitive activities and expectations, we tacitly assume that testimony, broadly construed, is sound and reliable. One need only consider how nasty and brutish our lives would be, in instances from the most mundane to the most esoteric, if this assumption did not hold. Suppose we could not rely upon labels on bottles, maps in atlases, or reports of experimental findings in medical biology or engineering physics. The shock experienced in instances of breakdown in one of these domains makes us realize how deep-rooted our expectations in fact are. Trust in these matters shapes epistemic communities and binds their members together.¹⁰

This implicit presupposition of trust is assumed both in exchanges of knowledge within an epistemic community and, with complex qualifications, from one community to another.¹¹ (Such

⁹Both Piaget, for the genetic side of this question, and Wittgenstein, for the more purely epistemological side (in his *On Certainty* position), show how a human knower comes to awareness within this community.

¹⁰This union is not always felicitous. One need only consider the overreliance, in contemporary society, upon technology as a means for solving social and human problems to realize that community is not to be commended simply *per se*. Yet our growing awareness of this overreliance is further evidence for the existence of epistemic community. If, for example, it were only a matter of changing a *few* minds, the world's ecological difficulties might well be overcome. Unfortunately, ecological policy must be formulated in opposition to a community of thought with its own cohesive interests and strengths. Community, thus, is both a negative and a positive force in its moral dimension.

¹¹Michael Welbourne puts it well: "We are linked with one another by a complex web of epistemic dependence-relations and we must all, at least dimly, sense that we are not separately self-sufficient in knowledge" (in "The Community of Knowledge," p. 303).

communities should not be considered coextensive with countries, cities, or political alliances. Boundaries criss-cross and interpenetrate in a multitude of ways.) To sustain this trust is a primary cognitive imperative: it is a condition of viable membership in an epistemic community. In fact, the very possibility of epistemic life is dependent upon intricate networks of shared trust.¹²

This basic trust is a tenuous and fragile construct, tacit and implicit though it may be. It is always open to violation by the very things that create and sustain it: belief in other people, confidence that much of what they tell us can be taken at face value, reliance upon our ability to assess their credibility. People are fallible, credulous, and deceitful. Examples abound. In the personal realm, one need only think of the devastation and disruption experienced when an intimate friend proves untrustworthy. In the public domain, the Nazis' use of professional medical journals to expose the "scientifically proven" dangers of sexual relations with Jews is a well-known example. The fabric of epistemic reliance is torn by such events; and it is much more difficult to repair a broken trust than it is to establish trust in the first place.

Once the pervasiveness of commonability is recognized, the question, "Is John believable?" becomes as pertinent as the question, "Is *p* believable?" When a person utters a declarative sentence, he or she is soliciting belief not just for *what* is said but, just as importantly, for his or her own trustworthiness. To believe a speaker is, then, to regard him or her as a source of knowledge.

When I ask you to tell me something or explain something to me, I assume you will reply in good faith, giving as accurate an account of your knowledge as is appropriate to the situation. If I trust in my own ability to assess the boundaries of your knowledge, I may believe you. On the basis of what you tell me, I can claim knowledge in turn, particularly if it is a specific piece of

¹² I am assuming, for purposes of this discussion, a reasonably "open," liberal society. Clearly, knowledge exchange works quite differently in totalitarian societies; though there, too, some level of interdependence is necessary for the society to continue to function at all. Evidently there are many societies, and circumstances even within the most liberal of societies, where trust and credulity impose different requirements of vigilance from those I am assuming here.

information such as the opening hours of the bank or the score in a football game.¹³ But my belief in what you tell me—that is, the belief that I, too, now know the score of the game—is not truth-guaranteeing: it is only truth-preserving (as long as truth was there in the first place to be preserved). What has taken place between us puts me in a reasonable position to claim that I know. It does not provide a guarantee that I know that I know.

Indeed, one of the limitations all such transactions encounter is the limited extent to which human beings *can* be reflexive about their knowledge. One cannot, simply by carefully examining one's own state of mind, ever know for certain that this state is without doubt one of knowing, of being right rather than wrong, or half-right and half-wrong. (Wittgenstein makes this same point when he writes of the possibility of speaking of a "mental state of conviction . . . [which] may be the same whether it is knowledge or false belief.")¹⁴ Having and conveying knowledge is very much a more or less affair, a tentative matter.

To believe that you are (or that John is) believable, hence that the knowledge you impart can be taken as such, I must make a just estimation of your epistemic "qualifications," particularly when I ask you more than the score in a football game. The onus of justification, therefore, is at least as much upon the validity of my knowledge about you (and about myself) as it is upon my claim to know *p*, because you have told me. The question about what counts as knowing another person, either *per se* or so that he or she can be considered a reliable source of knowledge, is too large for the scope of this discussion. Suffice it to say that it is a question we are constantly answering for ourselves when we decide to ask A rather than B for knowledge in certain contexts. That we choose not to ask B when both are available may have to do with an estimation of their respective credibility. Much of our epistemic competence is bound up with the ability to make such judgments. Usually we ask questions because we want to know, and we do so in full faith that by being told the answer we can

¹³The matter of whether it is rational to defer to epistemic authority, to know "vicariously, as it were," is illuminatingly discussed in John Hardwig's "Epistemic Dependence," esp. pp. 343–44.

¹⁴Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 42.

come to know what we wanted to know. But how, then, can we know whether this faith is well or ill placed?

It is important to understand the nature of this question and the kind of response that can be considered reasonable. The question does not require an appeal to an epistemic authority who, like Descartes' God, can provide an alternative epistemological foundation. This question is about responsibility and trust and is analogous to questions about responsibility and trust in moral contexts.¹⁵ It seeks an answer of the same variety as answers appropriately given to questions of morality: that it is justifiable to rely upon A in matters of this kind because of his or her epistemic integrity.¹⁶ Where such integrity is well established, there will be a presumption in favor of claiming to know what one has learned from A.

It is not possible to devise a rule of thumb for assessing the epistemic responsibility of other persons as sources of knowledge, or one's own responsibility either as a source or as a believer of testimony. Certain procedures can be mentioned, however. Given the centrality of trust, a fundamental task facing would-be knowers at every stage of cognitive life is to learn who can be trusted. Although Descartes rightly cautions that nothing can be taken simply on trust from authority, this warning need not be interpreted so as to construe all testimony as invalid. To recognize the force of the caution is to acknowledge the need for a policy of circumspection: it does not advocate absolute mistrust. Hume, too, inveighs against excessive credulity but does not imply that it is better to trust no one at all. Excessive credulity is not an inevitable outcome of trust: for epistemically competent individuals, at least, it will not be. One should not believe others blindly any more than, in the individualistic tradition, one should allow oneself to be blinded by one's own apparent discoveries. But one should not disbelieve others either without good

¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of how such questions require a new sort of context in a secular society, which has no commonly accepted, theological frame of reference, see Annette Baier's paper, "Secular Faith" in her *Postures of the Mind*. Secular faith, as Baier characterizes it, is what holds epistemic communities together.

¹⁶ The complexity of such reliance upon another's integrity is apparent in my discussion of the Gosse case.

reason, since this too threatens the fabric of cognitive interaction. In other words, one must be as responsible in one's disbelief as in one's claims to believe or to know.

The circumspection required here is thus double-edged. It suggests the need for as much care in assessing one's own cognitive endeavors as in assessing the integrity of one's sources of knowledge, despite the difficulties of achieving reflexivity. The most responsible epistemic move, therefore, is often to *suspend judgment*: responsibility may well reside not only in the admission of ignorance but in reserving assent or dissent in the face of sheer complexity. No amount of introspection can resolve, absolutely and finally, questions about whether one should view, or present, oneself as a knower. The solution to these questions lies in the world, independent of one's states of mind. Nevertheless, to strive for insight into the extent of one's own cognitive capacities, to distance oneself as much as possible so one can be critical of one's own knowing, is a crucially important aspect of epistemic competence.

Although I have been concerned so far with *knowledge* as a shareable commodity, it is worth adding that belief and understanding, too, are products of cognitive interdependence, with many of the same implications.¹⁷ Belief is as infectious and commonable as knowledge, though in a somewhat different way. Consider two economists' beliefs about the causes of recession or two historians' beliefs about the causes of the First World War. Although it is probably true that one of these historians or economists cannot, strictly speaking, *cause* the other to believe as he or she does, it makes perfect sense for A to claim to believe because of the force of B's argument and for one of them later to say to C, "We believe that . . .". The transmission process is not like learning the score in a football game directly by asking someone; and it is unlikely that one could try to believe certain things in the same way one could set out to learn a particular theory or theorem. Nonetheless, the example shows one way in

¹⁷ For a contrary view, see Welbourne's contention in "Knowing and Believing" (p. 320 ff) that, although knowledge is commonable, belief is not. He maintains that I can transmit my knowledge to you so that it becomes our common possession but that belief has no such analogue.

which belief is commonable: a belief has been transmitted to, shared with, another person.

Understanding, too, is commonable. To claim otherwise would run counter to most of the fundamental tenets of pedagogical theory and to the demonstrated successes of pedagogical practice, to cite just one central instance. A good teacher (whose rarity will readily be acknowledged) is able not only to show a pupil how algebra works (a practical matter of conveying knowledge) but, more importantly, to bring the pupil to understand the subject and its significance. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of any other subject that is taught or learned. The phrase "bring to understand" suggests that what is involved is quite different from giving a piece of information; at the very least it is less direct. This "bringing to understand," however, is as central a part of the commonability of knowledge as is learning the opening hours of the bank from one's neighbor. It is more difficult to test, but it is sufficiently analogous to "being able to go on" to complete a series of numbers, to use an expression from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*,¹⁸ for the same principles to apply in judging its success.

Simple examples of the sort ordinarily used as propositional paradigms in theory of knowledge often assume passivity on the part of the one who "receives" the knowledge conveyed. ("Being able to go on" is not simple in this way.) Consequently, it seems as if belief and understanding, which are more complex and appear to be acquired more actively and gradually, must be different from knowledge in kind, especially with respect to commonability. In contrast to acquiring knowledge of the date of a certain event, belief and understanding appear to require effort on the part of would-be knowers or believers and to be matters of degree, dependent upon factors such as background knowledge, level of credulity, and willingness to learn. Acquiring knowledge of a relatively simple, putatively paradigmatic kind has become so much a part of cognitive habit that the activity involved has become virtually imperceptible. Belief and understanding

¹⁸See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), § 143 ff.

thus seem to differ from knowledge in this respect. With more complex illustrations of commonability, though, the continuity among these cognitive processes becomes more apparent.

Contracts, Forms of Life, and Practices

The intricate networks of shared trust that sustain epistemic community are maintained by tacit agreement. For explanatory purposes, the implicit structure of this agreement could be seen as quasi-contractual. The contract analogy is helpful in understanding central features of the way epistemic communities function, but its usefulness does not depend upon its having any discernible, or convincingly speculative, origins. Parallels with social contract theory need not be too closely drawn. Nor is it necessary to the viability of this notion that an epistemic state of nature be conceived, where each person zealously clutched solitarily gained bits of information closely to him/herself, only later to make concessions to the advantages or protective necessity of cooperation. (Genetic considerations about the ways in which animals rear and instruct their young into the established, yet always changing, ways of the society point to the unlikelihood of such a solitary state of nature.)

As the wolf boy example suggests, it is difficult even to imagine how there could be knowers, properly so-called, in a state of nature. People would probably have only minimal knowledge, in the form of survival skills, but knowledge in any significant sense of the word, together with the lies and deceptions parasitic upon it, *presupposes* community. I do not conceive of an epistemic contract as an event which *creates* obligations but rather as a model for understanding the structure and workings of epistemic interdependence. My intention is not to speculate about how this agreement originates but, instead, to consider the implications of its workings.

The model is useful in explaining the sense of outrage that occurs when trust is violated. It helps account for the conviction that something tangible was violated and that the violator is thereby accountable. There is no question, in a well-functioning epistemic community, that one must be sanguine about receiving

false information, even from people in an unofficial capacity and with whom one has no specific personal relationship or agreement. Yet there is nothing in the laws of the land to proscribe many such occurrences on an individual, private level. I cannot bring legal action against someone who has knowingly misled me about the time the train leaves or given me wrong directions to the next town. Such instances are different from fiduciary relations between private individuals (professionals and their clients, for example) where misinformation, especially if based on malice or negligence, is actionable in the law of contract or of torts. But we need to be able to account for our justified outrage in these extra-legal matters as well. Legislation preventing false advertising shows that, in the public domain, it is not enough for such agreements to remain tacit. Our sense that it is reasonable to assume that people will provide accurate information, to the best of their ability, is based on the presumption that there is a general agreement to do so, even where the law is not involved.

There are better and worse ways of observing the terms of a contract. *Characters* admirable as exemplars, either of moral or of intellectual virtue, do more than perform the bare minimum required by the (unwritten) letter of the contract. They would not, for example, disclose only the barest facts when asked if they know about something (the epistemic analogue of working to rule); rather, they would take cognitive interdependence to be a *value* worth some effort to sustain. The contract model has the scope to account for such qualitative differences.

Although the notion of a contract implies a conventional, arbitrary construct, which might well take a form other than it in fact does, this could be true of an *epistemic* contract only to a point. The degree of possible arbitrariness within a workable epistemic contract is small indeed.

This point is interestingly illustrated in the case of the Ik, in Colin Turnbull's *The Mountain People*.¹⁹ One of the most disturbing signs of the breakdown of this society is the almost total impossibility of relying upon what anyone says, even in response to the simplest and most straightforward of questions. The study

¹⁹See Colin Turnbull, *The Mountain People* (London: Pan Books, 1972).

illustrates how necessary society is to human flourishing, how necessary cognitive interdependability is to the continued existence of human society. What seems at first to be a symptom of the disintegration of Ik society contributes, in no small way, to its continued disintegration. The impossibility of depending upon other members of one's community, even upon members of one's own family, breeds more of the same. Here we are close to a reversion to or, not to beg any questions, a deterioration into a Hobbesian state of nature. One can see what Peter Winch means when he writes: "The notion of a society in which there is a language but in which truth-telling is not regarded as the norm is a self-contradictory one."²⁰ The point is well taken, although one might add, somewhat less stringently, that what is essential to the establishment and/or maintenance of cognitive community is that one be able, at least, to determine what it is informants hold to be true, if only, perhaps, so that one can see how to negate some of the claims they utter. In the absence of this minimal condition, it is difficult to see how cognitive interaction is possible.

Human beings depend upon "forms of life" for their continued existence qua human beings; and forms of life, in turn, depend upon a basic level of moral and epistemic viability.²¹ A forms of life model of human interaction is a valuable complement to the contract model of epistemic interdependence. Winch insists that there cannot be a human society that is not also, in some sense, a moral community. Rightly observing that morality is not something (like science) that one can choose to engage in, that one cannot put oneself outside moral discourse in the way one can refuse to concern oneself with scientific issues, Winch asserts, "Moral conceptions arise out of any common life between men and do not propose any *particular* forms of activity in

²⁰In Peter Winch, "Nature and Convention," in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 61.

²¹I am drawing here upon Wittgenstein's rich and evocative concept, introduced and explored in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein observes, "It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. This is not an agreement in opinions but in form of life" (§ 241). And later in the text he writes, "Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life" (p. 174). "What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*" (p. 226).

which men may engage together.”²² These points are applicable a fortiori to cognitive activity. The quality of moral action is dependent upon an agent’s ability to understand situations rightly; and the epistemic imperatives of cognitive interchange are even less easy to evade, for cognition constitutes the warp of the fabric into which the threads of all human action and interaction are woven. (Hence there is a sort of honor among thieves. Even thieves must trust some of the communications, if not the intentions, of other thieves.)

In large part, a “normally” functioning society is thus one in which interactions are based in trust. (Truth-telling at the most basic level is a primary assumption, its essential “glue.”) When you ask where you can buy a cup of coffee, I recognize you as a person with requirements like my own, with ways of finding food and drink and satisfying hunger and thirst like my own; one who does not want to be poisoned and who does want a cup of coffee. Normally, I will not try to mislead you. (By contrast, an Ik, according to Colin Turnbull, would most likely be terribly amused if you actually *were* poisoned.) The underlying value here is fundamentally epistemic. It is different in kind from considerations of the *moral* value of truth-telling when, for example, a person who is dangerously ill asks to be told the extent of her illness. The lines of choice in everyday exchanges are quite differently drawn. To opt out of basic truth-telling (as many Ik in fact do) is to opt deliberately out of a shared form of life. This choice is at the furthest remove from the complexities inherent in social living, where to debate the value of telling the truth, in complex moral cases, presupposes just such forms of life.

I do not mean that truthfulness must have the same moral significance in every society. Truthfulness is much more basic—learning about telling the truth is a central part of what is involved in learning to speak.²³ It is so central that the very supposition that telling lies could be the norm of human linguistic interchange is self-contradictory. If truth or falsity arose from

²² Ibid., p. 59.

²³ At levels more complex than telling me where to buy a cup of coffee, there can be more than one way of construing a situation truthfully; hence considerations of epistemic responsibility can be both more intricate and more urgent.

merely random moves, blind choices, arbitrary relations, the meaning of "communication" would collapse. Conditions for accepting information would be wholly unclear, and it is not inconceivable that mass neurosis would be the result. People would never know where they were, either metaphorically or literally. The very notion of a society becomes unintelligible when its potential members cannot agree upon their places, roles, relationships, and common values, however amenable to change these agreements may be. Truth-telling, then, in this basic sense, is more than a moral and epistemic imperative; it is part of what holds the fabric of society together.

Truthfulness is to the institutions of language what integrity is to human institutions in general. But this is not to say that integrity as a virtue is exemplified every time a person makes a true statement; nor is lying simply a matter of using language incorrectly. Lying is possible only within a correct usage of language. It is a fundamentally antisocial act, letting down those to whom one is committed in virtue of being part of a community.

Winch captures well the importance of integrity in sustaining forms of life. He writes, "To lack integrity is to act with the appearance of fulfilling a certain role but without the intention of shouldering the responsibilities to which the role commits one. . . . If that . . . were to become the rule, the whole concept of a social role would thereby collapse."²⁴ These points are both well taken and elusive of elaboration because it is so difficult to know what we are prepared to count as integrity. It is an honorific designation that can properly be accorded in its fullest sense only to very few human beings. Yet it is in ascriptions of integrity that intellectual and moral virtue are most evidently recognized in a human being.

Taken in its minimal sense—as a sort of constancy in word and deed, a basic reliability—integrity is a first requirement for membership in a human community. If we could not count upon a modicum of integrity in one another, it is difficult to see how any human institutions, any forms of life, could persist. But this connotation of the word reflects its barest sense, indeed, perhaps

²⁴ "Nature and Convention," p. 70.

integrity is devalued as an ideal if so sparse a meaning is acknowledged. Nevertheless it captures a central manifestation of epistemic and ethical interdependence and suggests the necessity of both modes of reliance in sustaining forms of life.

For Winch, forms of life depend, first, upon possession of a shared language and, second, upon the exercise of specifically human intelligence on the part of participants in them. This is a good, though incomplete, specification of fundamental communal requirements. It fails to spell out a third, equally basic requirement: a viable degree of cognitive interdependability. This requirement is captured both by the contract model and by Alasdair MacIntyre's illuminating concept of *practice*.²⁵

Practices have features in common both with contracts and with forms of life. But an exploration of epistemic commonability using the model of MacIntyrean practices cannot take the place of the other two models, for the practice model fails to capture the necessity of cognitive interdependence, even for those (if there could be any) who do not participate in specific practices, definable as such. The practice model is a valuable complement to the other two models, because within specific practices there are particular ends or goals against which violations of the expectations that sustain the practice can be judged. The model can hence accommodate the teleological dimension of intellectual virtue, which I discussed in chapter 3.

To do MacIntyre's position justice, it is best to quote his definition of practice in full and to restate his own elaboration of its implications. He writes, "By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."²⁶ MacIntyre's point is not that virtues are *only* exercised within practices thus de-

²⁵ He elucidates the concept in chapter 14 of his book, *After Virtue*.

²⁶ *After Virtue*, p. 175.

fined; it is, rather, that these goods are internal to practices, even though they are not the only possible human goods.²⁷ According to MacIntyre, goods internal to a practice can only be identified through participation in that practice (presumably as spectator as well as practitioner—for example, in cricket or painting). Practices afford ways of defining the good for a certain kind of life; they embody standards of performance and obedience to rules, and point toward the achievement of goods.

Most importantly, practices are defined by a certain kind of attitudinal orientation. Farming counts as a practice for MacIntyre, but agricultural food production does not. The crucial difference is in the attitude of the practitioners: the relationship between the farmer, the land, and the way of life. MacIntyre contrasts what he takes to be a *caring* attitude, often characteristic of farmers committed to their work, with the (possibly) *distant* technological expertise that goes into efficient, agricultural food production.

As with all matters of such complexity, there is no clear rule for differentiating practice from nonpractice, nor can boundaries be tightly drawn to separate one practice from another. But every practice requires a certain kind of relationship among those who participate in it. This relationship is defined and structured by virtues, which MacIntyre now (tentatively, he says) defines as “*acquired human qualit[ies] the possession of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.*”²⁸

It is difficult to specify what counts as a cognitive practice in the MacIntyreian sense, because it could neither be defined according to traditional disciplinary boundaries in the academy nor along lines constituted by research institutions or groups

²⁷ There is no split between intellectual and moral activity in MacIntyre's approach. The parallels I have been discussing are therefore not difficult to draw. This unified approach is clear from the importance he places upon understanding the narrative unity of human life, both here and in his 1979 *Monist* paper (“Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science”). MacIntyre's concern in *After Virtue* is primarily with moral life, but an insertion of intellectual life into this framework is simply a matter of shifting focus rather than one of molding or distorting a concept to fit a role it was not intended to fit.

²⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 178 (emphasis in original).

otherwise officially, publicly visible. It would be equally inappropriate to characterize all cognitive activity as a practice in this sense. But within this diffuse activity, there are modes of knowing where considerations of epistemic responsibility are usefully clarified when we think of them in terms of MacIntyrean practices. Certain kinds of attitudinal orientation distinguish some aspects of cognitive activity from others evaluatively, not merely descriptively; and this distinction is in keeping with MacIntyre's own stipulated definition. To designate practices as "coherent," "cooperative," forms of activity where internal "goods" are realized and "excellence" is achieved is clearly both to describe them and to declare them valuable. They are valuable because they, in turn, are value-producing, value-creating, and value-sustaining—the grounds where virtues can flourish.

Undifferentiated, individual knowledge seeking cannot, *per se*, be a MacIntyrean practice, if only because of its randomness and its lack of structure and coherence. I am thinking of everyday, commonplace information gathering: looking to see whether the postman has come, whether it is raining, or whether the neighbors are at home—"passing the time of day." Yet some everyday information seeking does count, and again, it is attitude that makes the difference. Reading the morning papers in order to be as well informed as possible, checking reports against each other, trying genuinely to understand complex political, social, or scientific events does count as a practice perhaps at a minimal level.²⁹

The best way of defining practices is to remind ourselves that there are people engaged in most forms of human activity for whom that activity is properly a (MacIntyrean) practice, others for whom it is simply an activity. Both in institutionalized and in generalized cognitive activities, there are practitioners and technicians, differentiated from each other not so much by the substance of their enquiry as by the manner in which it is pur-

²⁹To establish such activities as bona fide practices, one needs, in part, to show how they fit into a larger whole (a socially structured whole). Arguably, even checking upon the neighbors, when done out of a concern for the people themselves or for the community, might be part of a practice (in MacIntyre's sense) of good communal living. Borderline cases like this are difficult to classify.

sued. The difference is, in point of fact, a matter of epistemic responsibility.

We cannot opt out of cognitive activity any more than, in Winch's terms, we can choose not to engage in the moral activity that sustains forms of life. But this enforced participation does not confer the status of practice upon all knowing, any more than it does upon all human interaction. In cognitive activity as in moral activity, there have been, throughout history, central, core conceptions of good explanation and right forms of understanding. These conceptions have changed throughout history so that there seems to be "no single, central, core conception of the virtues which might make a claim for universal allegiance."³⁰ Nevertheless, each successive account, in its formulation, "claims not only theoretical, but also institutional hegemony."³¹

Intellectual virtues are analogous to MacIntyre's moral virtues, at least in the following ways. First, to be acceptably formulated, intellectual virtues require an account of the features of cognitive interaction prevalent in certain times and places. Second, intellectual virtues can best be recognized by participating in a practice: those who lack the relevant experience are thereby incompetent judges of internal goods. Here, though, a caveat is required. MacIntyre is by no means committed to the view that all established practices are ipso facto good, amenable only to internal criticism and assessment. With reference to gladiatorial combat,³² for instance, he allows that an experienced practitioner can judge good trident users and good net men, but that this possibility has nothing to do with the moral value of the practice per se, which must be judged on another level. So, too, with knowledge. That there are good con men, good scandal-collectors and -mongers, recognizable by their fellow practitioners, is one thing. Questions about the value of their activities, both epistemic and moral, are quite another matter. One can be a good practitioner, making the appropriate, rational moves required by the practice in which one is involved, without being judged virtuous, because of the nature of the practice itself. Here the demands of good

³⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 173.

³¹ Ibid.

³² In a seminar discussion, Oxford, 1982.

moral conduct and those of good epistemic conduct are sharply divergent.

MacIntyre insists that “in the realm of practices the authority of both goods and standards operates in such a way as to rule out all subjectivist and emotivist analyses of judgement. *De gustibus est disputandum.*”³³ This point is as valid for a practitioner within a practice as it is for thinkers who assess the practice in terms not just of its internal consistency in realizing its particular goods but also in terms of its place in a more general scheme of human goods. It is from this second level that it is necessary to make pronouncements about the moral status of certain practices *per se*. Within gladiatorial combat, there are good moves and bad ones: these are matters about which dispute is indeed possible. From an external vantage point, however, gladiatorial combat violates certain principles of humanity and is hence morally condemnable in terms of higher order human values.

In MacIntyre’s view though, it is difficult to articulate a comprehensive, workable theory of the virtues in an age that has neither an Aristotelian *polis*, where virtues can flourish and human goods can be identified with the goodness of the *polis*, nor a theologically based conception of virtue. Yet much of the force of his position, which defines virtues *within* practices, comes from the ways in which outstanding figures in human history succeed in achieving exemplary status of the sort I have discussed in chapter 2, thereby pointing toward the possibilities of human achievement. Such people somehow succeed in transcending their time and place and, in so doing, set standards of achievement for those who become acquainted with their words and deeds.

It is indeed difficult to believe that such figures could play the role in contemporary society that the man of honor does for Aristotle, setting standards of moral virtue through his own goodness rather than by decree. For all its uncertainty, though, the case for a virtue-based standard of conduct is best made by citing exemplary cases of such conduct, both in the moral and in the intellectual context. That there are no absolute appeals does not

³³ *After Virtue*, p. 177.

imply that there are no appeals at all. Human nature, for all its fluidity, provides the only appeal available. Through just perception of human beings of extraordinary achievement, one can come to an appreciation of human possibilities.³⁴ One need not worry that the concept of what is possible will become fixed and static through such a process. Outstanding achievement tends to stimulate emulators to go beyond it as much as it encourages them to approach its level as nearly as possible; and just as often, too, it provokes debate and challenge. There is an interactive process of inspiration and aspiration visible here, more reciprocal than circular.

Together, then, the three models (contracts, forms of life, practices) capture something of the structure underlying cognitive community. The practice model adds an important teleological dimension to the contract and/or forms of life ways of thinking, yet it does so against an (at times) excessively conservative background. Many valuable insights can be gained from its use, heuristically, despite this feature: in my reading of it I have emphasized its more dynamic potential. It is in part, though, because of its strongly conservative pull that the practice model must be read in conjunction with the more open-ended forms of life and contract models. The need for this combination is plainer when one considers that people can conceivably opt out of most specific practices, or participate only in a select few (Meursault, in Camus' novel *The Outsider*, chooses such an option), but that one *cannot* opt out of epistemic community.

Even Robinson Crusoe is dependent for his mode of solitary existence upon his origins within a community of cognitive interdependence. His need to record the passage of time alone attests to this dependence. Wittgenstein's claims that, in order to know, one needs language and that a person (like the wolf boy) cannot succeed in using language without some community to exercise control over the use of signs and to articulate criteria of their rightness and wrongness relate closely to these points. Referring to efforts to use the sign "S" to mark the recurrence of a

³⁴This is why we tend to want to know *all* aspects of their lives and are disappointed when skeletons in closets come to light.

certain sensation, Wittgenstein observes: "But 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criteria of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that we can't talk about 'right'."³⁵ Solitary knowers whose entire cognitive life from beginning to end is lived in total isolation are not properly knowers, any more than equally solitary doers can properly be moral agents.

Epistemological Altruism

The conditions of human existence that give rise to moral theory, then, are the same conditions that lead to reflections about knowledge. There is a fundamental, if frequently imperceptible, regard for others³⁶ underlying human interchange in general and cognitive interchange in particular. Indeed, to some extent, a human epistemic community seems to be essentially altruistic in nature.³⁷ Not only do we human beings live side by side, but we do so in awareness both of one another's existence and of the need to consider one another, if only so we do not constantly tread upon one another's toes, either literally or metaphorically. Altruism, as I construe it here, has to do with all aspects of taking other people into account—from not treading on toes, to not giving erroneous information, to providing painstaking instruction and detailed explanations.

In Thomas Nagel's view, such basic non- or pre-virtuous altruism is not "abject self-sacrifice, but merely a willingness to act in consideration of the interests of other persons, without the need

³⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, § 258.

³⁶ Lawrence Blum, in *Friendship, Altruism and Morality*, uses the expression "being-toward-others" to do roughly what I want this somewhat cumbersome expression to do. (It is yet another sign of the disintegration of Ik society that altruism, for them, is mere stupidity.)

³⁷ Here I am using "altruistic" in its most basic sense, as Thomas Nagel does in *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Much of what I say about these minimal conditions, to clarify what is involved in asserting the importance of epistemic community, commonality, and commonability, is indebted to Nagel's book.

of ulterior motives.”³⁸ Its scope extends even to “mundane considerateness which costs us nothing, and involves neither self-sacrifice nor nobility—as when we tell someone he has a flat tire or a wasp on his hamburger.”³⁹ It is at this minimal level, too, that its epistemic importance begins, as when I tell someone the score of the game or the time the bus will arrive, or when I attempt to make conversation to establish some sort of initial contact.

Our normal activity of answering other people's questions as reliably as we can is so much a matter of habit that it could not properly be understood as altruistic, at least on any construal of “altruism” that implies making some special effort. Everyday, implicitly trusting, knowledge-conveying or -requesting activity that we engage in with other people is much more what we would call “second nature” than are activities that can specifically be judged altruistic. Indeed, if it should become appropriate to set them apart as altruistic by designating them thus, they would then no longer seem to be so fundamental and natural.

The possibility of altruism depends upon a metaphysical feature of an agent's conception of him/herself: upon “the conception of oneself as a person among others equally real.”⁴⁰ This metaphysical basis links altruism to formal aspects of practical reasoning: recognizing the existence of others in our deliberations is part of what we are as human beings. According to Nagel's altruistic principle, others are as important in their own eyes as we are in ours, and we are just one person among many for them, as each of them is for us.

Both for moral and for epistemic reasoning, such a presupposition has the primary advantage of locating the discussion within a particular point of view concerning the existence of other minds. Although this bare assumption does not commit one to any detail about what we can know about other persons or about how well, if at all, we can know them, it does, in fact, estab-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16 n.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14. Because I respect this presupposition, which he believes to underlie all altruistic behavior from the minimal to the maximal, and because there does not seem to be a better word, I retain Nagel's term even for such basic exchanges as I have mentioned.

lish a working hypothesis. It makes it possible simply to proceed from the assumption that other persons are creatures like ourselves who think as we do, within certain broad constraints, who care about things, and who feel and are affected by us as we are by them.

Nagel's altruistic position stands opposed to any version of solipsism, which "denies *sense* to the supposition that there are other persons besides myself." Such a denial is commonly based on the view that "the concepts which one applies to oneself do not include the possibility of application in the same sense to anything which is *not* one's own experience."⁴¹ The denial tends to be elaborated with the suggestion that certain kinds of language are used in a different sense, perhaps a behavioristic one, when applied to anyone else's putative experience. For one's own experience, such language has a privileged, hence presumably more accurate sense.

The point is not to dismiss solipsism as foolish or irrational: it is a matter, rather, of declaring where one stands. With Nagel, I see it as a fundamental characteristic of altruism, which is both semantically and substantively the opposite of solipsism "that it must be possible to say of other persons anything which one can say of oneself, and *in the same sense*."⁴²

This claim states the requirement in principle. There are difficulties with the phrase "in the same sense," of which Nagel, no doubt, is aware, though he does not spell them out here.⁴³ For example, however carefully I abstract myself from my experience in order to describe it impersonally, as the experience of one person among many, I cannot wholly escape the fact that it begins as mine and continues as mine even as I abstract myself from it, just as the abstracting, too, is mine. As long as I am as scrupulous as possible, this egocentricity may make very little difference to the objectivity of the resulting judgment. But I cannot avoid making the judgment from my own perspective. That

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴² Ibid., p. 101 (my emphasis).

⁴³ He does spell them out both interestingly and perceptively in *Mortal Questions*, especially in the papers "Subjective and Objective" and "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"

degree of subjectivity cannot be eradicated, nor is it desirable that it *should* be.

Just how this inescapable subjectivity will come out in practice is another matter. I think, simply, that it makes Nagel's metaphysical condition for altruism more of a mixed mode, less pure than he wants it to be—not necessarily a bad thing. Clearly, his principle is still universalizable in the sense he requires. My awareness of myself as one person among others, all of whom are included in a single world, will be a recognition of the need also to consider the ineluctably perspectival nature of *everyone's* efforts to know and judge. In this sense, the awareness shapes the requirements that standards of good knowing can reasonably impose.

My point is not, though, that a demonstrated *possibility* of altruism will establish altruism as the (or *one* of the) absolute moral values; nor is epistemic altruism meant to be the supreme cognitive imperative that all human knowledge seeking activity must, in one sense or another, observe. I am, rather, insisting upon the natural and psychological necessity of some kind of altruistic recognition in human cognition. The assumption that other persons are creatures like ourselves who approach the world and know it as we do clearly makes seeking information from them, from the simplest of questions to the most demanding perusal of another's scholarly works, a practice upon which we quite naturally embark. That we naturally seek information from others is not merely an anthropological, psychological, or sociological fact; it is a fact about basic possibilities and fundamental preconditions of knowledge. Human beings come into existence and begin and continue to acquire knowledge in and through social interaction. Yet the epistemological importance of this commonplace occurrence is too frequently obscured by assumptions about cognitive autonomy.⁴⁴

To develop a workable altruism is to give content to the Kantian

⁴⁴ Annette Baier argues convincingly that even in realizing "what's what" and in changing one's mind one must be a member of a community. "[R]ealization," she maintains, "cannot be recognized without being shared. . . . *Realize* is used when I speak as a member, not as an outsider" ("Realizing What's What," in *Postures of the Mind*, p. 32). Also, "The liberty to change one's mind . . . rests upon

notion of a good will. The will, thus construed, is good in two senses: good simply as such and good insofar as it is a will *for* the good, or for goodness in specific instances. Circular though this claim might be, the goodness of the will does consist, in part, in the capacity to discern goodness. To the Kantian notion of good will must be added a kind of teleology with something clearly Aristotelian about it: the view that conceptions of goodness derive from our experience of this or that particular goodness. Hence there is a link with MacIntyre's morally (and intellectually) ideal practitioners. One is reminded of Aristotle's claim that we come to know what whiteness is through the experience of this or that particular whiteness.⁴⁵

Participants in a society (and not all members are properly participants, many are freeloaders or subversives) have a responsibility for the society as such, just as practitioners within practices have a responsibility for the practices as such. They are not, properly speaking, merely participants. To accept this proposition is to accept the further point that participants are, at the same time, conservers and modifiers of practices. They have a constitutive role within practices, however difficult it may be, in mass society, to discern this role. Practices can be created and preserved only by their practitioners; they are neither self-generating nor self-sustaining. Intellectual goodness consists, then, in conducting one's moral and intellectual life so as to contribute to the creation and preservation of the best possible standards appropriate to the practices within which one lives.

This conclusion may seem to beg an important question by giving the impression that it is possible to know what the goods are that are to be realized. But achieving intellectual goodness does not depend upon knowledge in any standard sense. It is a

membership in a community where there is mutual recognition, which trains its members in some conventions . . . and which has the practice of affirmation, of second-thinking an individual's judgment about how to use the training received" ("Mind and Change of Mind," in *op. cit.*, p. 66).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Aristotle, *The Categories*, translated by E. M. Edghill, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, R. McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 1971), 2a34; and *Metaphysics*, translated by H. G. Apostle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 1038b, 1040b.

matter of learning from example, from persons of reason, integrity, and courage. The fact that exemplary people are often not recognized for what they are does not negate the importance of this claim. Socrates' death does not invalidate the principles for which he stood, any more than does Thomas More's or Martin Luther King's.⁴⁶ This secular conception of moral and intellectual virtue leaves our appeals to reason and integrity without absolute foundations; yet, they are founded in what we can best achieve within the scope of human potential. They are thus neither more nor less well founded than knowledge itself, where attempts to establish ultimate foundations have repeatedly failed.⁴⁷

It is not possible to designate a vantage point external to practices from which judgments of their worth can be made. The best we can do in our efforts to be intellectually virtuous is to aim for the greatest degree of objectivity possible.⁴⁸ To recognize who and what we are, as justly as possible, is no mean achievement. It is neither a matter of course, nor is it something that all human beings just manage without further ado.

Pursuing the parallel with MacIntyre's account of moral virtue, a virtuous practitioner within a cognitive practice values participation for the sake of goods internal to the practice. He or she sees value in the pursuit of and contribution to knowledge within the practice, simply *per se*. Yet there is no requirement of intellectual purity, which would enjoin engaging in a practice for no external rewards—either of renown or of financial or other gain; no requirement that external goods be abjured nor that epistemic values must always override moral or practical ones. The actual attribution of intellectual virtue is separate from the realization or nonrealization of these goods.

⁴⁶ It is only a coincidence for this point that these persons died for their beliefs. Einstein did not, nor did Albert Schweitzer.

⁴⁷ Defending a position very like this one, Harold Alderman argues that the "universally paradigmatic moral character" offers a way of avoiding the infinite regress of moral debate. Exemplary character, he maintains, has about it a "moral obviousness" that provides a better grounding for goodness in human conduct than do arguments about rights, goods, or rules. (See H. Alderman, "By Virtue of a Virtue," *The Review of Metaphysics* 36, No. 1 [September 1982].)

⁴⁸ By this, I mean possible within constraints such as Thomas Nagel spells out in "Subjective and Objective" and "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (in *Mortal Questions*).

There are degrees of epistemic responsibility, however. It is not unreasonable to see evidence of such responsibility both in conscientious plodders, who make honest efforts to sustain a practice as best they can, and in innovators of some creative renown, as well as in practitioners sufficiently wise or gifted to see a whole practice in a broader human context and to judge it accordingly—to stand back from the “lure of the technically sweet”⁴⁹ and assess the moral implications of the endeavor as a whole. Szilard, for example, was able to stand back in this way in the early, heady days of atomic research; someone must have taken a similar stance when gladiatorial combat was abolished; and members of the Resistance were, finally, able to take such a stance in Nazi times. Such actions take courage and, given the rarity of true courage, it would be unreasonable to make it a requirement of good intellectual conduct. But the goodness of a society is sustained by the vigilance of its best and wisest members, even though, in mass society, they must speak more loudly to be heard than in the Aristotelian *polis*. Nonetheless, MacIntyre’s point is well taken: “Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice.”⁵⁰

Consequences

Several approaches are now possible. One might reaffirm the need to reserve the term “knowledge” only for instances amenable to treatment within the individualistic tradition. Examples I have taken as evidence of commonability might then be relegated to the domain of opinion, except those that are, in principle, knowable at first hand. One might also argue, as Quinton suggests is often done, that “in general our beliefs in the early stages of our careers, before we have achieved cognitive auton-

⁴⁹ Oppenheimer is said to have used this phrase to refer to the attraction of scientific discovery. It is quoted by James Eayrs in *Science and Conscience* (Toronto: C.B.C. Publications, 1968), the transcript of a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation television symposium (p. 5).

⁵⁰ *After Virtue*, p. 178.

omy, are not justified beliefs, and thus not really knowledge at all for us"⁵¹ and extend this argument to cover all knowledge and belief not autonomously acquired. The epistemological task would then be to sift through these beliefs and set out conditions for their justification. Those that pass the test would be promoted to the status of knowledge, the rest relegated to the lower status of opinion.

An alternative, related approach might resemble Peter Unger's in his book *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism*.⁵² In Unger's view, ours is a language with absolute terms. Anything I claim to know must be absolutely clear to me so that it is inconceivable that it should ever successfully be contested. Since he cannot think of any aspiring knowledge claims that could ever fulfill these conditions, Unger proposes that the only responsible move for rational thinkers is to acknowledge their ignorance. Recognition of commonability might seem to add strength to his proposal. The tenuousness and uncertainty commonability entails may lead questors after certainty to the despairing stance that nothing can properly count as knowledge in the knowledge-by-acquaintance sense. Everything is derivative and, thereby, suspect: hence the word "knowledge" must be expunged from epistemological usage. One must concede that all that has hitherto passed as knowledge has been merely belief, opinion, and hearsay; hence, one must remain ever sceptical.

These are not the only rational courses, however. To hold that knowledge is commonable requires neither that all knowledge be communally acquired nor that cognitive autonomy be impossible. Rather, the stance shows something of the limitations of autonomy, the scope of commonability, and the need to become clearer about the interaction between the two. One consequence might be to abandon any residual philosophical insistence upon perfect certainty.

Although appeals to ordinary language cannot settle philosophical disputes, they can afford some insight. The elasticity characteristic of the word "knowledge" in ordinary language

⁵¹ Quinton, op. cit., p. 68.

⁵² Peter Unger, *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975).

need not be taken as a sign of careless, imprecise thinking. In ordinary language, "knowledge" has a much larger family of meanings than epistemologists might be inclined to allow; and although it would not be philosophically acceptable simply to take ordinary usage as a reflection of how things are, it would be equally unreasonable to discredit it outright. We must leave open the possibility that those items of our experience that, in common parlance, we refer to as "knowledge," but that we not only have not acquired but could not acquire at first hand, do nonetheless merit the continued designation "knowledge." It would not be appropriate to make philosophical demands so incommensurate with human cognitive practice that they have minimal bearing upon it.

III

Epistemic Life

CHAPTER 8

Literature, Truth, and Understanding

Fiction as a Source of Understanding

I have argued throughout this book that reflection upon human knowledge must not lose touch with human cognitive experience, and I have affirmed the epistemological worth of the narrative context, where the development of character can afford a special kind of insight into human endeavors to make sense of the world. From this line of thought, it is but a small step to affirm the epistemological value of literature per se: to the view that literature itself is a source of knowledge for both writer and reader. This thought is implicit in my suggestion that there is a curious mono-dimensionality in the character of Philip Gosse, whose fanatical devotion to truth precludes his participating, even as reader, in the experience of literature. The literalness of his cognitive life denies Gosse access to the kind of insight and understanding literature makes possible.

Among the modes of knowing I discuss in chapter 6, it is understanding, in particular, that has a vital source in good literature. Certainly factual knowledge is made accessible here, too: we are instructed about life in nineteenth-century Russia after reading Tolstoy—we learn about a certain social milieu and acquire a set of beliefs about the Russia of that time. Most of all, though, we come to understand something about the characters as people. It is this kind of understanding of people, experiences, and ways

of life and values that literature can best afford. Here, the creativity of knowers, both as writers and as readers, is plainly central to the success of the enterprise. This is a complex process. It is as much dependent for its successful realization upon the sensitive receptivity of the reader as it is upon the skill, perceptiveness, and sensitivity of the writer.

Yet epistemologists have long been wary of seeing literature as a source of knowledge, for many quite valid reasons. Its association (or identification) with rhetoric is central among these reservations, its elusiveness in terms of verifiability, truth value, or univocal meaning: its outright falsity, one might say. How can knowledge come from what is avowedly and unabashedly *not* true—from what is deceptive and seductive? This is the paradox one must try to resolve in declaring literature a source of knowledge.

I do not mean to imply that all writers intend their work to convey knowledge, nor to take any position about the relevance or irrelevance of those intentions to this issue. Literary works have cognitive import regardless of the specific assertions of either the writer or the readers (and critics) about the former's intentions. Neither poets nor novelists who claim to write simply for the sake of writing can avoid the fact that the product is bound to show something of what they know. When the works are made available to *any* other view, something of their creator's view of the world, and of what is meaningful in it, is revealed, perhaps directly, on the surface, perhaps in the gaps and exclusions in the text. For this reason alone the work has cognitive import, whatever the writer's intentions.

I am not saying that literature has a primary, didactic purpose that somehow fails if the wrong state of affairs is made its subject. It is simply not true that all writers of merit are social realists who intend their work to carry a message. A created work may exist wholly in itself, a writer may express a firm allegiance to *l'art pour l'art*, and critics may pose complex challenges to the authority of the writer, the text, of any one reading. Yet, in a successful work, a subject matter is presented in such a way that a writer's and a reader's understanding of it can be influenced and even altered.

Curious constraints go with the recognition of this potential, constraints that have to do, specifically, with epistemic responsibility. They affect both writer and reader, albeit obliquely, indirectly, and paradoxically, given the license writers traditionally enjoy. Two central questions must be answered, then, if literature is plausibly to be declared a source of knowledge, coherent within a responsibilist epistemology. First, given the paradox created by its "falsity," one must explain how literature can be viewed as a source of knowledge. Second, one must explore the connection between epistemic responsibility and the creation and re-creation (in reading) of literary works.

Two quotations set the stage for this exploration. Anthony Quinton writes, in *Thoughts and Thinkers*, "Imaginative writers are concerned with human beings, from the standpoint of introspection or else as members of a society. British philosophy in this century, in so far as it has been concerned with human beings at all . . . has considered man . . . as a detached spectator, conceptualising his physical environment. . . . [I]t is still Cartesian man that they study."¹ In a similar vein, writing about Derrida, Jonathan Culler observes, "One could argue that . . . the move which sets aside certain kinds of language as fictional, rhetorical, in an oblique and problematic relationship to truth, is the gesture by which philosophy, since Plato, has exorcized certain problems and defined itself."²

Both of these quotations give some indication of why philosophers often reject the suggestion that literature, with its dangerous, ambiguous, and problematic features, can open the way to knowledge. Potential rewards in explanatory clarity are greater when a domain of enquiry is restricted to exclude the problematic and the ambiguous. Yet Quinton and Culler imply, both in these quotations and in the contexts where they occur, that a cognitive potential resides in literature that should be exploited because, to borrow what is now a philosophical cliché, clarity is not enough.

Now, what, exactly, can one come to know from literary works?

¹ Quinton, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

² Jonathan Culler, "Jacques Derrida," *Structuralism and Since*, ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 177.

Given the variety of subject matter and of literary genres throughout history, there can be no single answer, but Quinton's claim that imaginative writers are concerned with human beings suggests a starting point. There are few novels without characters. Even if these characters are hobbits or March hares, bears or robots, the modes and events of their interactions are still fleshed out in quasi-human terms.³ The point is not just that we can learn about human beings from literature; indeed, it might be argued that we do not need literature since we *are* human beings, and we know only too well what that means. Some might think, too, that, if we do not know about human beings, then we would be better advised to turn to psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, or sociology. Although it is true that we know what being human is like, having lived with the fact of it for many years, we really do not know nearly enough about it, for we are alarmingly opaque to ourselves and others. Psychology and other social sciences can tell us a good deal about ourselves, perhaps even with more *clarity* than literature could ever achieve. But the process I am concerned with here is directed toward coming to terms with ambiguity rather than achieving clarity—toward getting inside the complexity of people and situations and thus finding out about them ourselves, at least a little.

The claim that literature is a source of knowledge rests upon a belief in the value of understanding the particular. It implies that a minute and inward understanding of particulars has the capacity to go beyond itself, to show something more general about certain ways of being and kinds of situations. The technique involved is the converse of Plato's technique in the *Republic*, where we see virtue "writ large." It is like a move in the opposite direction, from microcosm to macrocosm; it finds philosophical expression in Aristotle's view, cited in chapter 7, that the proper approach to essence is through knowledge of individuals—that one comes to know whiteness through knowing this or that particular whiteness. It qualifies as the sort of thing

³ Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* may seem to be an exception to this rule. Even though the women in this novel are undifferentiated and barely "characterized" or fleshed out as individuals, however, in the communality of their existence they show possible ways of living that challenge existing social structures.

Hegel refers to as “the science of the particular,” or as Sartre’s “*universel particulier*.”

This kind of knowing, with its primary realization in *understanding*, is glossed over in the (Rylean) knowing how/knowing that categorization of human knowledge. Neither knowing how nor knowing that is articulated in claims to know *something about* what it was like to live, as a certain kind of person, in nineteenth-century Britain after reading George Eliot’s novels. Nor can insight into the way of life, manners, moral attitudes, and emotional responses of Jane Austen’s characters be accurately described as knowing that—as the sort of facts one would learn from a social history of the times, for example. On the contrary, a novel opens the way for readers to experience what a situation is like and, hence, makes a difference to their thinking and knowing, if only by putting many of their assumptions in question.

In other words, it is not just the “factuality” of experience one thus understands, even though facts are an important part of it. One also comprehends a situation’s emotional implications, its affective tone—the implications of living in a world of disintegrating values, for example, which Yeats articulates in “The Second Coming,” or of the problems of reconciling the “prose and the passion” in human life, which Forster explores in *Howard’s End*. Such understanding of emotional experience is not readily achieved from descriptive or analytical, factual accounts, for at the end of an analysis of emotion, be it grief, joy, passion, or despair, the emotion itself remains elusive. A textbook description of physiological and psychological manifestations of an emotion such as grief leaves experiences of grief untouched and unfelt.

Indeed, probably because it eludes discursive, propositional formulation, the affective aspect of knowledge is persistently viewed as unmanageable by epistemology, with its emphasis upon products of the intellect.⁴ Yet feeling is integral to human

⁴Thus Susanne Langer observes: “Discursive thought gives rise to science, and a theory of knowledge restricted to its products culminates in a critique of science; but the recognition of non-discursive thought makes it just as possible to construct a theory of *understanding* that naturally culminates in a critique of art” (*Philosophy in a New Key* [New York: Mentor Books, 1948], p. 116).

activity. What human beings know is as dependent upon what interests, excites, or threatens them as it is upon what they detachedly investigate. One cannot gain insight into the nature of cognition if this aspect is neglected. Literature creates a genuine semantic beyond discursive language where much of human affective experience can find expression.⁵ A reader is led into a potentially empathetic understanding of the artist's created or recreated experience through an immediate apprehension of a state of mind, a state of affairs, or a truth.

The nature of this understanding can be explained with the help of Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description—although I am interpreting the distinction somewhat more broadly than Russell intended, in keeping with the spirit rather than with the letter of the concepts.⁶ In this broad construal, I consider knowledge by acquaintance to be all knowledge with its source in immediate experience. Knowledge by description, by contrast, has its source in testimony, written or spoken: it includes historical, geographical, and scientific knowledge and knowledge of other people's experiences.

Knowledge with its source in literature stands between these two designations and might be called "knowledge by second-hand acquaintance." The import of this kind of knowledge is lost in discursive or analytical presentation. In its occurrences elsewhere (that is, neither in a poem or a novel), it is simply knowledge by description: a more distanced knowing. In poetic or

⁵In *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin make a convincing case for a sympathetic attitude to views like these in the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. They write, "Wittgenstein's radical separation of facts from values can be regarded as the terminus of a series of efforts to distinguish the sphere of natural science from the sphere of morality. . . . On this interpretation, the *Tractatus* becomes an expression of a certain type of language mysticism that assigns a central importance in human life to art, on the ground that art alone can express the meaning of life. Only art can express moral truth, and only the artist can teach the things that matter most in life" (p. 197).

⁶See chapter 5 of *The Problems of Philosophy*, op. cit., and "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," in *Mysticism and Logic* (London: Unwin Books, 1963). Russell extends the initial characterization of knowledge by acquaintance to include knowledge through memory and introspection and knowledge of universals. He suggests, too, that it is probable there is also knowledge by acquaintance of the self. In adopting the spirit of Russell's distinction, I should emphasize that I am interpreting it in its broadest sense.

prose forms, though, it is a showing rather than a telling. The work shows what a situation is like by taking one into it so that one experiences it almost directly. It does so very much as a photograph shows how a person looks better than any description could evoke his or her appearance.⁷ Knowledge by second-hand acquaintance is similar to the understanding one has for situations one has experienced oneself. Through literature, one has the possibility of experiencing “what it is like to be x ,” either as an x kind of person or in an x kind of situation.⁸

Knowledge thus achieved is *objective* knowledge in a special sense that involves up-ending the traditional subjective/objective dichotomy.⁹ In this up-ended sense, scientific interest in a phenomenon is properly called “subjective.” It is an investigation of use-value for the knower, who seeks to know the general, universal, standardized meaning phenomena. Art and literature, by contrast, seek to understand and express individuality and particularity. In this sense, they treat their object *objectively*, in and for itself. One can, perhaps, do something with scientific knowledge: hence its *subjective* validity. It makes a difference to have seen objects of experience thus: a difference that pervades subsequent seeing and experience and adds to understanding—objective understanding in this up-ended sense.

⁷The acquaintance model breaks down, though, if one takes as a measure of its success whether or not each viewer sees in exactly the same way. Russell’s own efforts to derive the purely objective “simples” of human knowledge from knowledge by acquaintance met with limited success partially in consequence of the difficulty of fulfilling such a criterion. The best one can say is that my perspectival viewing and knowing of a situation are inescapably *my own*; yet they must have some coherence within a wider, communal scheme if I am to trust them.

⁸These points apply somewhat differently to works of fantasy such as Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* or Gunther Grass’ *The Tin Drum*. Here, it is not as cogent to know what it is like to be a talking rabbit or a boy who decides not to grow, rather the works allow one to know a whole set of alternative possibilities (or impossibilities made plausible) that cast new light upon entire aspects of experience. One can thus, by a more circuitous though no less valid route, understand the experience with deeper insight. In the more straightforward sense I have just outlined, Graham Greene writes of the novels of R. K. Narayan: “Without him I could never have known what it is like to be Indian” (in the “Introduction” by Graham Greene to R. K. Narayan, *The Bachelor of Arts* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978]).

⁹This sense is suggested by John Macmurray in *The Self As Agent*, pp. 199–200, and explained in a similar fashion in G. D. Kaufman’s *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*.

It is part of the puzzle inherent in this view that knowledge through literature is knowledge of the nonexistent (that is, of something that does not exist, in the usual sense, in the "real" world). A writer must bring a certain kind of knowing to the subject of his or her creation to be able to realize its particularity. Yet this subject need not be and usually is not, except in some historical novels, a specific particular. There need not have been a real Mr. Bennett with a foolish wife and five marriageable daughters for Jane Austen to have known them and their situation well. Austen knows *these* human beings in circumstances of *this* nature. She makes it possible for her readers to understand them too, even though they may never have existed. Yet, the works in which a particular attains a wider resonance with communal experience, or those that perhaps highlight that experience by virtue of their dissonance with it, are the ones that achieve the status of good literature.

Oddly too, "rootedness" in a particular time and place seems to be necessary for a work of art to succeed in achieving relevance beyond those circumstances. Mrs. Dalloway and London are intimately interconnected, as she herself is repeatedly aware. In another place and time, she would have been a different person. Mr. Micawber and Uriah Heep enable us to understand something about human possibilities precisely because their individuality is so minutely observed and recorded. Were they less specifically English, less specifically of a certain time, place, and class, less carefully drawn as individuals, it would be less easy to find, in their lives, points of resonance (or dissonance) with one's own experience. A literary statement rooted in this way enlarges a reader's knowledge both by leading him or her to experience something of the time and place of its origin and by making a statement about how it is to live through the complexities of a certain kind of situation. An expanded awareness is achieved by a singularly difficult balancing process which succeeds only if "rootedness" does not overwhelm to the extent that the work becomes narrowly parochial and, hence, communally less relevant.

Still more curiously, a reader need not exactly re-create the experience the writer is trying to create. A successful work allows a breadth of interpretation so that it is open to many people in dif-

ferent ways. A literary narrative does not represent a pre-given reality. Even the most careful description leaves readers free to re-create the experience in their own terms, within boundaries drawn by the writer. But this re-creation is not remarkably different from knowledge per se, construed as the product of a creative synthesis of the imagination, constrained both by the nature of reality and by human cognitive capacity. With literature, constraints imposed by reality work somewhat differently, and the role of the creator has no direct counterpart in ordinary cognition; still, the discrepancy between the two modes of knowledge acquisition is not as great as it might initially seem.

It would be a mistake to think that this kind of understanding becomes complete when certain key, literary works have been read. One could not responsibly claim to understand completely or exactly what it was like to be a nineteenth-century Russian after having read Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekov. Knowledge of this sort is not mastered once and for all so that, because of having read certain books, one could say, "Now I know what there is to know." It is a matter of degree. More responsibly, then, one could sometimes be justified in saying, "Now I have a glimmer of understanding."

The case will be clearer if we concentrate briefly upon this metaphorical "glimmer" of understanding. The assumption is that our seeing, both of ourselves and of others, is usually imperfect. Moreover, there are crucial limitations upon the epistemic primacy of natural vision, and our knowledge will be more adequate if we can be brought to see by other means, among them literature. Yet to accept the possibility of literary illumination is again to face the puzzle that what *is not* can show something of the *truth* of what is. (This fact is really no more puzzling than the fact that what is not in itself colored can make us see color.) Unlike science, then, which tries to offer complete solutions to clearly designated problems, literature examines, explores, and contemplates in a never-completed process.¹⁰

¹⁰ Consider, in this connection, Thomas Kuhn's observations:

Like most puzzles, those that scientists aim to solve are seen as having only one solution, or one best solution. Finding it is the scientist's goal; once it is found all earlier attempts lose their felt relevance to research. . . . The artist, of course, also has puzzles to solve, whether

Responsibility for Truth

To judge a literary work, one must not only consider its literary value but also its validity in conveying a right sense of situations, persons, and events; hence questions about truth and falsity must be faced. Collingwood, for example, notes, "Art is not indifferent to truth; it is essentially the pursuit of truth. But the truth it pursues is not a truth of relation but of individual fact."¹¹ Standard theories of truth are only partially helpful in understanding how art can pursue truth.

The truth of a literary work is not judged strictly by criteria of correspondence: we do not fault Jane Austen because Mr. Bennett cannot be found. The demand for *verisimilitude* in what one reads, however, suggests that we expect something closely related to correspondence. Richard Kuhns speaks of a requirement of "plausibility," which is closely akin to correspondence with reality: to mimesis.¹² Coherence seems to be a more appropriate criterion for judging truth in literature. One is wary of according respect to works where the inner structure fails with respect to coherence, where characters act too much "out of character," and events stretch our credulity too far. But even coherence does not suffice. Truth of individual fact is better characterized as a truth of disclosure, though correspondence (or plausibility) and coherence are by no means irrelevant to the success of disclosure. Truth of disclosure requires a setting both plausible and coherent; and there must be both an openness to experience on the writer's part, if the disclosure is to occur at all, and an openness on the reader's part, if it is to achieve its ends (unspecific though those ends may be). Whether or not disclo-

of perspective, coloration, brush technique, or framing edge. Their solution is not, however, the aim of his work, but rather a means to its attainment. His goal . . . is the aesthetic object, a more global product to which the law of the excluded middle does not apply. Having seen Matisse's *Odalisque*, one may regard Ingres' with new eyes but one does not stop looking. (In "Comment on the Relations of Science and Art," in *The Essential Tension* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977], pp. 346–47.)

¹¹R. G. Collingwood, *the Principles of Art* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 288.

¹²See Richard Kuhns, *Structures of Experience* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), pp. 17–22. Kuhns observes, "Drama can tolerate unreality or inconsistency with everyday experience, but it cannot accept the implausible" (p. 21).

sure is successful cannot be determined by argument. Success depends more on a reader's "Aha!" response: "Yes, *that* is the way things might happen, that is true to life." Being true *to* life differs from truth *of* fact: it is both a looser and a more demanding relation.

Intuitive apprehension of truth in a work cannot be equated with naive response; nor does a beginning in intuition imply that judgmental criteria will remain purely intuitive. The idea of "literacy" implies that one must learn how to listen or to read to experience what a work can offer. One can be led into an alternative, unfamiliar world where intuitive response must take the form of a gradually achieved attunement, by no means naive or temporally immediate. Yet, as with truth of fact, reasons can be brought to bear to demonstrate the validity of an intuition.¹³

George Steiner's discussion of *Middlemarch* is illuminating in this respect.¹⁴ Steiner explores the interplay of the knowledge George Eliot brings to the creation of *Middlemarch*, the knowledge a receptive reader brings to the work, and the knowledge with which one finishes reading it. He writes, "The language of the novelist is comprehensive of all requisite perception; we sense immediately 'behind' or within it a formidable, entirely verifiable, gathering of felt knowledge."¹⁵ The problem is to discover how we can verify what never occurred.

One obvious point, connected to Kuhns' plausibility requirement, is that, although the characters in *Middlemarch*—Casaubon, Dorothea, Lydgate, and Bulstrode—did not exist, they might well have existed. It is a mark of a writer's technical and cognitive expertise that readers are not distracted by questions

¹³ Hilary Putnam's observations are instructive here. He writes, "No matter how profound the psychological insights of a novelist may be, they cannot be called *knowledge* if they have not been tested. . . . [I]f I read Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night* I do not *learn* that love does not exist, that all human beings are hateful and hating. . . . I learn . . . to see the world as it looks to someone who is sure that hypothesis is correct. I see what plausibility that hypothesis has; what it would be like if it *were* true; how someone could possibly think that it *is* true" (in "Literature, Science and Reflection," in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978], pp. 89–90).

¹⁴ See George Steiner, "Eros and Idiom," in *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

of verisimilitude. Indeed, there are curiously elusive, yet strong epistemic demands upon writers, who construct characters from within and must know them well to do so for all their unreality. Eliot's insight into the possibilities of human character is evident in the novel, from its least to its most significant personages. Her insights are verifiable in that we can bring our own experience to them and them back to our experience, understanding both more clearly in the process. A writer's insights "ring true" if one does not find oneself excessively distracted by wondering whether things could possibly be like that.

Even when credulity is stretched, as it might be when it is revealed that Dorothea would marry Casaubon or that she would approach Rosamund with compassion and forgiveness, we might understand something more about human capacities and possibilities than we have hitherto known.¹⁶ Knowledge can be achieved, then, not just through knowing people and circumstances that are not real, but through participation in worlds and situations that go beyond our expectations.

It is important, too, to consider the part of the novel that depends upon fact. Its factual accuracy in observing and recording not merely the letter but the significance of actual events is a source of knowledge and is verifiable. Steiner writes of "the erudition, the responsible learning which make possible the treatment of Lydgate's medical work and ambition. . . . The description of Reform Bill agitation and of the role of the new journalism in it—a role ironically yet understandingly located in the novelist's handling of Will Ladislav—[which] again draws its conviction from a body of knowledge personally gathered, wholly ordered, and in reach of feeling."¹⁷ This factual accuracy is verifiable by conventional means: we can check and compare accounts of the state of medicine at the time, of the machinations that led to the passing of the Reform Bill, of the development of the new journalism. The fact that verification is possible might lead one to ask why we need the novel. There might seem to be little (*epistemic*) point in reading about a group of fictitious characters set

¹⁶This is analogous to what occurs in the confrontation with initial implausibility, gradually becoming plausible, in a reading of *Les Guérillères*.

¹⁷Op. cit., p. 102.

in the midst of verifiable, historical events that we can learn about from straight factual accounts, untinged by the rhetoric and persuasion that seduce us into feeling we are participants in these events. But the point is, we know and understand factual events differently by experiencing what it might have been like for people to live through them. They are differently illuminated, we have another perspective on them when we experience something of their effects on human lives.

We can only *responsibly* claim to know either about the factual events or about the fictitious characters and the intentionally fabricated juxtaposition of the two if we have good reason to believe that the writer's treatment both of the real events and of the unreal characters is a responsible treatment. To some extent, *Middlemarch*, and Steiner's discussion of it, provide examples that are too good; yet, as with evaluations of works of art in general, the central, outstanding examples provide pivotal points for evaluation, criteria that other works approximate and against which they are judged.¹⁸ Undisputed artistic masterpieces, like character models in discussions of virtue, play a normative role both in aesthetic judgments and in judgments about the philosophical implications of works of art.

By the same token, though, literature can give an inaccurate historical picture without failing aesthetically. Dickens might be a dangerous source of knowledge, perhaps even a source of pure propaganda, for a reader with no historical understanding or insight. We assume that Solzhenitsyn's knowledge about Soviet Russia is to be trusted when we accept the human, political, and moral implications of the worlds he creates in *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*. But where the question is one of verifying the factual part of a creative interweaving of truth and falsehood, the onus is at least as much upon the readers as it is upon the writer. There is a strong tradition according to which writers are perfectly free to create any events at all. If a reader claims knowl-

¹⁸This is how the literary canon is established. In concentrating upon the criteria thus created, it would be a mistake to overlook the powerful constraining force inherent in such standards, which results in subversive and innovative literary experiments, required for the healthy survival of a culture, being too often denigrated, suppressed, or relegated to the status of minority literature.

edge about what life was like at a certain time from having read these writings, it is the reader's claim that must be substantiated.

I think I understand something about the options open to a woman of a certain class at a certain time in Britain from having read Jane Austen and George Eliot. To make such a claim responsibly, though, I must appeal to broader sources of information. Where actual, historical events or characters play central roles in a work, one expects that the research has been done accurately; but there is no outright obligation upon writers, given the long tradition of poetic license, to tell things as they were rather than as they might have been. The onus is thus upon the readers to be sure that any claims they make are responsible.¹⁹ When good, independent reasons are adduced in support of knowledge claims originating from such novels, this knowledge is likely to be qualitatively different from knowledge of the same facts gained solely from social histories. Theory of knowledge needs to make room for this kind of qualitative assessment, where degree and depth of understanding, however unquantifiable these may be, are accorded importance as aspects of knowledge.

To accept on faith is clearly irresponsible, but as with matters of responsibility and trust more generally, there is a cumulative aspect to literary trustworthiness. Dickens establishes his credibility, as do George Eliot and Solzhenitsyn. To trust a writer is to do neither more nor less than one does throughout one's life in acquiring knowledge from other people. Often, as I have argued in chapter 7, both as ordinary people and as theorists of knowledge, we underestimate the extent to which our knowledge has its source not in our independent explorations of the world but in other people's testimony, either in their written works or their spoken words. Knowledge seeking is a tenuous and tentative process, crucially dependent for its continued success on fundamental presuppositions about good faith. Acquiring knowledge about life in the factual environment Eliot, Dickens, or Solzhenit-

¹⁹Hilary Putnam observes, "It cannot be said that after reading it [i.e., *The Golden Notebook*] one has acquired *knowledge* of what it was like to be a communist in the 1940's, unless one has some independent source of knowledge that Doris Lessing's account is factually true" (op. cit., p. 91).

syn creates is an extension of and a variation upon the cognitive interdependence central to all human knowledge-seeking activity. Much of the knowledge acquired is verifiable in a similar way.

The Case of Styron: The Factual and the Fictional

To clarify some connections between literature, knowledge, and epistemic responsibility, I shall look at William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice*. I choose Styron's novel in spite, rather than because, of its literary qualities; it is not a successful work. It is instructive for my purposes, however, because it aims explicitly to do what I have claimed a literary work must do. Styron observes, through the narrator: "I have thought that it might be possible to make a stab at understanding Auschwitz by trying to understand Sophie. . . ." ²⁰ His expressed purpose in writing the novel is to try to understand the human implications of certain events that are part of our common history. He seeks to achieve this understanding by showing the import of these events in a single life and in the impact of this life upon other lives. The reader is led into Sophie's situation in Poland, Auschwitz, and New York, to live through her experiences as though at first hand. From the novel, one can understand a little of what it must have been like to be a victim—and a survivor, though not in any absolute sense—of Auschwitz. The ingenuousness of the narrator's character affirms the difficulty of knowing about this situation from the outside.

The novel illustrates the cognitive role of literature. It is *objective* since it seeks to understand its object in its particularity, and thus to gain insight into a set of circumstances with far-reaching implications. It explores affective aspects of the situation; it offers no political, historical, or sociological account, discursively and detachedly presented. It attempts rather to re-create affective modes such as fear, terror, despair, anguish, and love. These emotions are elusive of description, but they need to be evoked to know what it was like to live as people like Sophie did.

This novel is certainly not indifferent to truth. The narrator,

²⁰ William Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), p. 265.

clearly Styron's mouthpiece, remarks, "The preparation I went through at that time required that I torture myself by reading as much as I could find of the literature of *l'univers concentrationnaire*."²¹ On the whole, Styron seems to have been painstaking in collecting factual material and scrupulous in weaving into it believable characters and plausible sets of circumstances. His purposes are morally and epistemically commendable. He believes there is an obligation to understand this situation and that, through literary creation, we can come to know about it responsibly. For the most part, the work achieves these purposes.

There are voices of dissent about the possible moral and epistemological worth of such a novel, and these objections merit attention. Reviewing *Sophie's Choice*, playwright Arnold Wesker asks, "Are there certain realities which it is impossible for art to recreate adequately enough to enable us to exercise our emotions, sensibilities and intellect trustworthily?"²² And George Steiner, writing about holocaust literature some years before the publication of Styron's novel, urges that we not "add the trivia of literary, sociological debate to the unspeakable."²³ Steiner believes that "each of us has been diminished by the enactment of a potential subhumanity latent in all of us."²⁴ Plainly, his view is that only those who lived through the holocaust ought to produce accounts that might enable others to understand it, and then, only accounts that could be called "objective" in a conventional sense should be produced: reports, diaries, photographs. The implication is that it is irresponsible to seek *knowledge* in works that attempt to evoke empathetic understanding. Such sources, in Steiner's view, necessarily distort and, thereby, trivialize. He is convinced that there are ways in which we *must not* learn about the holocaust.

Now this argument is problematic. It must be granted that there are aspects of human experience that do not (morally) bear distortion and that, because literary creation is not simple

²¹ Ibid., p. 262.

²² Arnold Wesker, "Art Between Truth & Fiction," *Encounter* 54 No. 1 (January 1980): 52.

²³ George Steiner, "Postscript," in *Language and Silence* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 199.

²⁴ Ibid.

reportage (or else it would not be literature), it is bound to distort, if only because it must be created from a point of view. "Objective," historical knowledge is also the product of a point of view, however, as is knowledge in general to a considerable extent as I have maintained throughout this work.

Literature is bound to focus upon aspects of a situation that satisfy aesthetic as well as factual criteria; herein presumably lies a source of Steiner's concern. Tales about the holocaust, when given fictional form, hold a quasi-pornographic fascination that can lead readers to experience and know about the events they narrate in a manner potentially reprehensible, both morally and epistemically. In Steiner's view, though, the *Warsaw Diary* of the murdered Jewish scholar, Chaim Aron Kaplan, like Hannah Arendt's account of the banality of Eichmann's evil, survive moral scrutiny. They present and do not conceal, but they do not presume to re-present. This distinction, however, is not all that clear. It is impossible to ensure that people will read either factual or fictional accounts for the right reasons. Steiner might well argue that, at least by rejecting fictional accounts, one rejects, a wide spectrum of potential *wrong* reasons. But reasons for reading factual accounts vary widely too, with quasi-pornographic fascination by no means excluded.

Steiner's view that a literary treatment of "unspeakable" events is necessarily trivial cannot be maintained as a general precept with any degree of credibility. There are innumerable works of trivial fiction, but literature also abounds with nontrivial, morally concerned works, often specifically addressing questions of good and evil. The latter add to our understanding of moral quandaries and dilemmas in human life, thus complementing theoretical, ethical treatises.

Steiner seems to think that a literary representation of evil, where the evil is experienced personally, renders it too palatable, masking the horror apparent in factual, documentary accounts. Such desensitization is certainly a danger against which any reader must be on guard, whatever the work. The concept of representation as realized will-to-power, as a conquering of its subject matter, merits only distrust. To believe that Styron has dealt with the complexities of the situation so thoroughly that he

has grasped its implications in their entirety and rationalized them so that one need no longer think about them would clearly be irresponsible. The ease with which such a misconception can be created leads one to be wary of the popular success of *Sophie's Choice*. Understanding gained in this fashion is always incomplete, open-ended. It is difficult to conceive of what could possibly be meant by *complete* understanding here, nor would a responsible knower claim such understanding.

Seemingly nothing should be untouchable by an artist's hand as long as she or he approaches it openly and respectfully. Although I mean neither to dismiss Steiner's position out of hand nor to deny that he is concerned with a complex dilemma, I find it difficult to endorse his insistence upon a sacrosanct domain. A community needs writers to create and understand what other people cannot experience themselves but need, nonetheless, to understand. Through the insight literature offers, one can experience something of the oppression not only of Jews but also of blacks, of women, of the mentally and physically handicapped. We can justifiably demand care, delicacy, and respect in any literary depiction; but we cannot demand silence. What Styron does is neither an invasion of privacy nor otherwise morally blameworthy.

Steiner praises Kaplan's diary as a source for understanding the holocaust. He comments that, "In such a labour of understanding lies the only possible mode of forgiveness"²⁵ and argues that only those who "passed through hell" have the right to forgive. This point, too, is problematic. When these events are consigned to the realm of the unspeakable, one loses sight of the more terrible truth that these were human beings acting toward other human beings. Even those who did not pass through hell need to understand, but not necessarily in order to forgive. There *are* unforgiveables in the world. There is an epistemic imperative to try to understand; but forgiveness need not be the aim. It is equally possible that one will come to understand and thereby see that forgiveness is not possible.

Steiner may be right in saying that the holocaust is an event so

²⁵ Ibid.

unique in its horror as to elude representation. It is so close to the extremes of human experience that neither artist nor audience possesses the "objectivity" (in my sense of the word) necessary to make art out of it or to recognize art in it. This inability may be explicable in terms of freedom of interpretation: a reader's freedom to re-create *this* scene may be too great. The facts themselves are so compelling that the boundaries of such freedom must be constricted. This line of thought is persuasive, yet the fact remains that people need to know the truth about historical events. Styron's work makes it possible to know about something we can neither experience nor even imagine. I do not endorse Steiner's view that understanding cannot be achieved in this way.²⁶

Despite my support in principle for Styron's endeavor, I have reservations that relate to Wesker's question about the possibility of adequately re-creating certain realities. With historical fiction in general, as with holocaust fiction in particular, one expects the research to have been carefully done. On this point, Styron seems to be blameless. One expects, too, that factual and fictional interweavings will not stretch one's credulity with regard to points that clearly depend upon how it *was* rather than on how it might have been. In this respect, there is reason to be uneasy about *Sophie's Choice*.

Much of Sophie's guilt at having survived is connected to her attempt to seduce Rudolf Höss in exchange for her son's release. Styron draws an intimate portrait of Höss as a man with tangled motives of kindness and cruelty, lust and revulsion, control and uncontrol. Indeed, one of the horrors of the holocaust is that these human beings were *not* purely evil. They loved and were anxious like all human beings, yet they were able to behave as they did. The point is worth making; but Styron's way of making

²⁶Steiner's views do seem to have changed on this point. In a 1981 lecture in the United States, he advocated trying to understand figures such as Hitler and Stalin through the historical novel, maintaining that the detachment of a professional historian makes it difficult for him/her adequately to re-create the aura of living through the influence of such people. Steiner's novel, *The Portage to San Cristobal of A. H.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981) is presumably his own attempt to do just this. The novel is interestingly discussed by Hyam Macoby in "George Steiner's Hitler," *Encounter* 58 (May 1982).

it is curiously disquieting. One doubts the legitimacy of representing this intimate aspect of a historical figure by a relationship that *cannot possibly* be based upon knowledge. This representation, I think, is irresponsible.

Literary re-creations of actual events must convince readers of their accuracy, if only implicitly by failing to make one suspect inaccuracy. The cognitive value of the whole is lessened by any stretching of the reader's credulity. Styron's re-creation is irresponsible in that it implicitly claims cognitive value for an episode that could not have been adequately documented. It would have been better had Styron added a fictitious, high-ranking official to those known to have been in command at Auschwitz. When fiction is too tightly grounded in fact, demands of plausibility are particularly stringent.

Wesker is concerned about the fact that Styron's narrator makes so much of the time relation of events. The narrator cannot rest easily with the fact that, at the moment of Sophie's choice, he was eating bananas in the United States, just as other people everywhere were attending to their ordinary concerns while Nazi atrocities were taking place. The juxtaposition is too much for him to bear. This preoccupation has the makings of a strength in Styron's work. It emphasizes the incomprehensible fact that life did go on everywhere else while people suffered and died in concentration camps.

Now although one must not lose sight of the uniqueness of the holocaust, neither must this uniqueness be accorded greater emphasis than it can bear. It is an overwhelming truth about human lives that they are not temporally commensurate. While I am sad, others are joyous; while I am mourning a death, others are eating, laughing, and quarreling. It is always hard to accept the simple fact that other lives and events go on even while one is suffering and time seems suspended. The holocaust, despite its immeasurably vaster scale, is just such an event, and it is still true that we proceed with our daily tasks while wars go on and people commit all manner of outrage against their fellow human beings. We risk losing sight of the incomprehensible humanness of Auschwitz if we overemphasize its uniqueness. It is difficult, then, to trust our reactions to this novel.

Ultimately, it is a matter of truth: a truth that, for Steiner, must elude those who were not participants. Clearly, one can best understand and claim to know about what one has lived through oneself. This fact rarely carries the corollary implication that one ought not (either morally or epistemically) try to understand what one has not experienced. Such an implication would be unreasonable given the breadth of possible knowledge and the limitations of possible firsthand experience. To be epistemically responsible, we must select our documents with care, be they factual or fictional, and be wary of believing too readily on too slender grounds. But this kind of care must attend every honest attempt to know about anything. There seems to be no outright moral irresponsibility in Styron's endeavor, though there are points where a charge of epistemic irresponsibility seems warranted. I have drawn attention to these areas in the course of this discussion. His work is flawed, but not too seriously flawed to achieve some measure of success in its purpose.

Implications

In chapter 2, I remarked upon Philip Gosse's near-fanatical devotion to truth, manifested, for example, by his refusal to allow the reading of fiction in the house because of its capacity to corrupt his son's mind. I linked these observations to his own efforts not to be swayed by affectivity and, indirectly, to his failure to achieve self-knowledge. From the present chapter, it should be clear that the causal connections operative here cannot be straightforwardly or simplistically drawn. Gosse's lack of self-knowledge and his excessive integrity were not *caused*, simply and directly, by the fact that he did not read fiction; if he had read certain, carefully chosen novels, all would not necessarily have been well. Nor are people in general who do not read novels, by that token, lacking in intellectual integrity and epistemic responsibility. The connections are not so easily traced.

My purpose in developing this "responsibilist" approach to human knowledge is to examine conditions for knowing well, not to provide a formula for acquiring indubitable knowledge. To expand upon the cognitive value of literature, then, is not to

add another item to a checklist of what must be done in order to know, rather, it is to examine a valuable source of knowledge. It is better, more enriching, for a person to have this kind of knowledge than not to have it, so it contributes importantly to the overriding goal of *knowing well*. In virtue of its potential to appeal to the heart as well as to the head, literature is a particularly appropriate source of knowledge, especially for an epistemology concerned with maintaining continuity with experience and the *Lebenswelt*. Good, sufficiently rich and detailed case studies and good biographies are akin to literature in this respect.²⁷ When they succeed in the same way, it is probably because they are creatively conceived in a manner that resembles the creation of good literature.

There does, none the less, seem to be a link between literature and knowledge, and in particular between literature and self-knowledge. Artistic creation (and re-creation as reader or spectator) is as unique to human existence as are language, reflexivity, and laughter; by coming to know their own created products, and hence the potential of their creativity, human beings find one route to self-understanding.²⁸ (This point connects with the characterization of human knowledge per se as the product of a creative synthesis of the imagination.)

Philip Gosse's lack of self-awareness seems to relate to his unwillingness (perhaps his inability) to stand back from himself and his work, to recognize his *own* creativity in what he himself is and in his scientific discoveries. This lack of self-knowledge perhaps contributes to his almost superhuman stance with respect both to his faith and to his scientific endeavor. He cannot recognize himself for what he is: a member of a community, strug-

²⁷ For an interesting discussion of the workings of literature and other methods of illustrating points in moral discourse, see Onora O'Neill, "The Power of Example," *Philosophy* 61 (1986).

²⁸ Marx Wartofsky makes the point this way: "Such a view of art as a mode in which human praxis recognizes itself in its own objects, and comes to realize the capacities and limits of human creativity in this objectified form, is a particular case of that reflexivity by which the dialectical tradition characterized the distinctively human" (in "Art As Humanizing Praxis," in *Models* [Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979], p. 358).

gling imperfectly to know just as others have struggled. Nor can he acknowledge his faith and his work as systems of explanation, each of which captures only a limited number of possibilities for understanding a certain range of phenomena. His limitations are linked to his separation from the emotional, creative experience of his fellow human beings and from himself and the affective import of his work and faith. "Know thyself" is apparently an injunction of which he is unaware.

In the discussion of intellectual virtue in chapter 3, I argued for the value of knowing oneself in order to guard against excessive obtrusion of self. From good literature, one can come to *understand* hitherto unarticulated aspects of human experience and, hence, to know oneself better both as an individual and as a creature of a certain kind. Gosse seems not to know himself well, and he rejects literature. When the cognitive potential of literature is recognized, then, one suspects there might be a connection between these two lacks in Gosse's life.

We have noted Gosse's lack of imagination, his incapacity to comprehend "in the immensity of nature," as his son puts it.²⁹ He is like a person who has never seen a mirror and hence has no idea of the aspect he presents to the world. Literature, at its best, achieves a kind of mirroring of self, together with an imaginative, creative synthesizing of that mirroring with the rest of experience. One need not find oneself or see oneself reflected exactly in characters in books. Sometimes, though, one does come to know oneself better for having looked into the mirror. Insight occasionally comes out of the resonance of one's own experiences with those of characters in a work, making it possible to see more clearly, casting the imagined circumstances before one to see how they would be. Sometimes, however the insight comes from a sense of dissonance, or antipathy, a recognition of why one would not like to—indeed *should not*—be like that: something one recognizes as a painful possibility.

Such mirroring creates and sustains human community, both in its ethical and in its epistemic dimension. In chapter 2, I ex-

²⁹ See the quotation from *Father and Son* in chapter 2.

plored Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of *character*, as drawn from Japanese Noh plays or medieval morality plays, and discussed his claim that characters are constitutive of a culture's moral definitions. I argued that exemplary characters play an analogous role in creating standards of intellectual goodness. Like living exemplars of virtuous character, characters created in literature often come to stand either for potentialities of human nature or as cautionary models warning against ways of being that are best avoided.

The modes of communication by which such characters become part of a cultural heritage are manifestations of the workings of the epistemic community. One turns to novels often because of recommendations from critics, teachers, or friends. In turn, one wants others to read what one has found moving, interesting, and illuminating. Thus, one tests one's perceptions, feelings, and/or moral sense, seeking affirmation both from writers and from others whose reading of these writers one has reason to respect.

Questions about responsibility are at issue here, too. They relate not just to the processes by which critics, teachers, and friends establish their credibility as discerning readers, but also to efforts made to judge the responsibility of literary works. We require a certain consistency in a literary work and require it to take itself seriously. Indeed, one frequently experiences a justified antipathy toward a work that lacks a reasonable measure of consistency, very like the antipathy one might feel toward a person who refuses to be consistent.

Internal consistency is what is expected, except in cases where real events are intermingled with fictitious ones. In much of the material of fiction, one knows that the writer is a sort of liar. The literary "lie" is both a repression and a bringing to light; in a curious sense, distortion and evasion create their own route to truth. The freedom to "lie" thus mitigates the consistency requirement, for startling inconsistencies are often part of the truth-revealing capacity of a work, a sort of "what if . . ." approach. The demand is not straightforwardly for realism, then, except in those problematic fact-fiction blendings where an exceptionally deft interweaving of true and not true is required.

The *fact* of potential literary enlightenment suggests that, even in "nonliterary knowing," knowledge acquired without the aid of imagination (used here in a non-Kantian, quasi-fantasy sense) is a poor thing. Imagination is indispensable in all processes of discovery, from everyday hunches tested against the environment, through scientific discovery in a more formal context, to the role I have suggested for knowledge from literature. Only by imagining possible interpretations of phenomena does a scientist know what future experiments to construct; only by imaginatively reconstructing putative past events can historical hypotheses be advanced; and only by imagining how it would be to *live* with moral theories can their significance and validity be properly understood. Novels may not give us moral knowledge directly and unequivocally, but they often show us ways of placing moral points of view in possible human situations. They illustrate some of the perplexities and implications of putting moral theories into practice so that one can see the importance of certain stances and understand something of why they will or will not, should or should not work.³⁰

People read novels for innumerable reasons: for diversion, out of admiration for the author or fascination with the theme (as with the holocaust), or even because of the attractiveness of the dust jacket or the title. Motive matters not. What does matter

³⁰The force of these claims extends well beyond the sphere of *moral* knowledge. Roger Shiner makes a good case for seeing the same process at work in understanding philosophical theories of other sorts as well. Both epistemological and metaphysical perplexity, he argues, are imaginatively illumined in Tom Stoppard's plays. "Philosophical discussion has repeatedly emphasized the importance of memory in personal identity. The understanding of this that we derive from observing the action of the play is a *philosophical* understanding that comes from being *shown* the disorientation [that is, of finding it difficult to remember one's past], from having it enacted before us. . . . Our understanding of the grammar of personal identity is . . . enhanced" (Roger Shiner, "Showing, Saying and Jumping," *Dialogue* 21 [December 1982]: 630). Stoppard's *After Magritte* is, Shiner claims, full of epistemology, concerned with "the relationship between experience and the external world, and the way in which descriptions of sensory experience never entail descriptions of physical reality. . . . [We] are *shown* the point that anti-realist epistemologies obscure" (p. 631–32). Stoppard's plays speak, too, to the moral imagination. In *Jumpers*, Shiner maintains, "We are being shown . . . not an Absurdist gap which denies morality, but the reality of the moral *despite* the fact that morality has no sources but the human form of life" (p. 641).

is that, from reading, one might come to understand oneself and other people a little better. If the reading affords only diversion, however, we could not then say that the reader is a poor knower. It would be wrong to insist that good knowers are those, and only those, who tap all possible sources of knowledge or who turn every pleasure into an instructive exercise.

CHAPTER 9

Cognitive Practice

The Division of Intellectual Labor

It is by now commonplace fact that, whereas Renaissance man might have realistically hoped to know all there was to know, late twentieth-century woman or man has not the faintest hope of so doing. This age is one of dependence upon experts. The extent to which this dependence *should* be acknowledged is a matter that needs careful consideration, both ethical and epistemological. But such consideration need not begin with an argument to demonstrate that deference to and dependence upon experts and authorities characterize epistemic life. Interdependence is part of everyone's cognitive experience.

In this chapter, I shall explore the connections between epistemic responsibility and cognitive interdependence as they are manifested in what Hilary Putnam aptly calls "the division of intellectual labor."¹ I shall indicate that the workings of epistemic responsibility are perhaps most readily seen and understood in communal scientific practice as Michael Polanyi discusses it in his essay, "Mutual Authority."² I shall go on to show, though, that cognitive interdependence is not restricted in its usefulness to the kind of open and cooperative division of intellectual labor Polanyi discusses. It can be given content and shown to be workable even with respect to Michel Foucault's anti-individualistic

¹ In *Reason, Truth and History*, p. 108.

² Michael Polanyi (and Harry Prosch), "Mutual Authority", in their *Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

conception of knowledge and its connection with power. There are marked contrasts between these two approaches to human knowledge, centering around their different views of the place of individual cognitive agents in the networks of power that govern the creation and/or emergence of knowledge; but the concept of epistemic responsibility can, I think, bridge the two, seemingly antithetical approaches. After showing how concerns about epistemic responsibility arise in each context, I shall, in the final section of the chapter, look at a particularly important instance of the division of intellectual labor: educational practice. With this example, I mean to highlight what has emerged in this book as a whole about epistemic responsibility and human cognitive experience.

The division of intellectual labor occurs across the entire cognitive spectrum, from creative literature at one extreme to scientific experimentation and discovery at the other. To take an example from science, the theory of special relativity is one that most ordinary people cannot verify for themselves: indeed, many people do not even learn it but only know *of* it, in varying degrees. With respect to literature, many people who were not in the First World War might claim to know something about what it was like to have lived through it from reading a well-researched novel. Such cases, with innumerable others like them, provide the most obvious evidence for the necessity of this division of labor and show something of the division of intellectual authority it entails. Referring to special relativity theory, Putnam observes, "Ordinary people defer to scientists for an informed (and socially accepted) appraisal of a theory of this type."³ Deference accorded to literary writers of stature is perhaps not as pervasive in this scientifically oriented society, but its manner and function are analogous.

The point is that the source even of an intelligent, thoughtful layperson's knowledge and/or beliefs about microbes or electrons

³*Reason, Truth and History*, p. 107. Putnam goes on: "The judgment that special relativity and quantum electrodynamics are 'the most successful physical theories we have' is one which is made by authorities which the society has appointed and whose authority is recognized by a host of practices and ceremonies, and in that sense institutionalized."

is likely to be textbooks or scientific articles written in a language nonspecialists can understand. This language must gloss over some of the more subtle, but possibly also most important, technicalities not usually with an intent to mislead but just to make presentation possible. Hence, in many matters of which a person might claim a degree of knowledge and understanding (and claim it *responsibly* within the dictates of what one can reasonably be expected to have done to substantiate the claim), there may have been minimal, if any, direct contact between the knower and what he or she claims to know. Yet such claims can be made both responsibly and comprehensibly to others within a communication network as long as sources are judiciously chosen and “mutual authority” is responsibly exercised.

It is instructive to consider Polanyi’s version of how cognitive interdependence is manifested in practice and, indeed, within a *practice* (in the MacIntyrean sense) by examining the practice of scientific research.⁴ The implications of designating scientific research a practice are both positive and negative. On the positive side, scientific research provides a fine example of a practice where intellectual virtue and epistemic responsibility can be seen at work; it is hence a properly MacIntyrean practice, a ground where virtues can flourish. On the negative side, a practice in a state of flourishing tends to be rather single-minded, pursuing its aims with less self-scrutiny and self-criticism than what might be desirable. Any continued flourishing, however, is possible only insofar as there *are* pauses for reassessment at points of strain. Clearly, a certain amount of conflict is necessary in good cognitive practice to maintain it at peak attunement.⁵

These ambivalent implications notwithstanding, what happens in a scientific community can profitably be taken as an example of the importance of an interdependent, responsible approach in intellectual activity as such: what holds for scientific practice also holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for other intellectual prac-

⁴It is worth noting that MacIntyre sees physics (with baseball) as one of the only practices properly flourishing in our time.

⁵Indeed, some might say that this conflict is now happening, given the clash of conceptual frameworks implicit in the predominance of quantum theory over classical theory.

tices (though not all of these are inaccessible to the uninitiated in precisely the same way as highly specialized scientific findings are). One firm caveat is, however, called for here. In claiming scientific research to be paradigmatic, I do not mean to contradict my central contention that it would be a mistake to take scientific *methodology* as paradigmatic for cognitive methodology in general. My point is not to suggest that all knowledge should be modeled upon scientific knowledge after all. None the less, the cognitive interaction of a scientific community nicely illustrates the nature and extent of human cognitive interdependence.⁶

Polanyi challenges the long adhered to (though now less tenacious) conception of science as a body of observable facts that anyone can verify. He argues that laypeople are not usually in a position to verify scientific findings for themselves and that they accept scientific statements on the authority they acknowledge scientists to have in their special fields. Though this claim in itself is not too startling, it becomes more urgent to consider its implications in view of the further, equally significant consideration that scientists themselves must rely heavily for their facts upon the authority they acknowledge in their fellow scientists. They use the results of sciences other than their own and of other scientists in different areas of their own field, results they may feel neither called upon *nor* competent to test for themselves. Already the picture of a complex network of interdependence is becoming clearer. For this interdependence to be workable, there must be a tacit basis of trust and trustworthiness similar to what I have described as a sort of epistemic contract.⁷

Responsibility within this practice is essential to its flourishing.

⁶This is the point of John Hardwig's "Epistemic Dependence" article, *op. cit.*

⁷In an interesting review of William Broad and Nicholas Wade's book, *Betrayers of the Truth: Deceit in the Halls of Science* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), David Jarovsky writes of the important role *Science*, the publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, has in policing against scientific fraud. The existence of such a network of safeguards against plagiarism and fabrication is necessary in view of this practice within the scientific community of accepting a colleague's results on faith, not checking upon them first. A tacit basis of trust makes such acceptance reasonable, and the safeguards help assure this trust will not lightly be violated. (See David Jarovsky, "Unholy Science," in the *New York Review of Books*, 13 October 1983.)

Polanyi writes of a *principle of mutual control*⁸ within scientific practice, whereby scientists keep watch over one another, subject to criticism by other scientists and, at the same time, encouraged by each other's esteem. With such mutual control, epistemic authority is established and dogmatic or fantastical excesses are checked: an epistemic agreement is maintained. We must not underemphasize the extent to which a delicate balancing process is vital to the continued flourishing of both practice and practitioners. Different scientific fields form "*chains of overlapping neighborhoods* extending over the entire range of science."⁹ This agreement is an enabling feature of scientific discipline as such; it facilitates both progress and mutual control. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of knowledge in general.

Yet, what is an enabling feature is also, potentially, a constraining feature. There is a potential tyranny involved in any human institution that can inhibit as much as it facilitates new routes to discovery. Demands for responsibility in these matters are strong, for interdependence is Janus-faced. Although interdependence makes it possible for practitioners to use and rely upon the findings of their colleagues, it is also constraining because of the control scientists exert over the communication channels through which contributions are submitted to the scientific community. Polanyi's observations in this connection are worth quoting at length:

Only offerings that are deemed sufficiently plausible are accepted for publication in scientific journals, and what is rejected will be ignored by science. Such decisions are based on scientists' fundamental convictions about the nature of things and about the method which is therefore likely to yield results of scientific merit. These . . . are not codified into laws and regulations, nor are they applied in . . . a legalistic manner. They are . . . everything that is involved in the traditional pursuit of scientific inquiry, and they are to a great extent only tacitly applied in forming a judgment.¹⁰

⁸Op. cit., p. 191.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 185. The negative effects of this control are apparent in the case of Barbara McClintock, winner of the 1983 Nobel prize in genetics. McClintock's 1951 discovery of movable genes in Indian corn was largely ignored for two decades, primarily because her results contradicted some of the basic tenets of ge-

The implications of these observations are instructive. Would-be contributors to any area of research are, according to this account, fundamentally and vitally dependent upon the good will of those practitioners within the area who set the standards not only of acceptability but also of plausibility, indeed, one might well argue, of *truth*. For a researcher's efforts to receive a hearing, therefore, it is crucial that the "fundamental convictions about the nature of things" of the scientists in question be such that they respect the normative force of realism.

This is a tricky point to elaborate adequately. It is not that scientists must start with a view that things *really are* like *this*, and that only experiments, hypotheses, and theories consistent with this conception deserve scientific attention. Nor, however, is it a matter of urging that complete open-mindedness, an absolutely theory-neutral approach, is the only responsible attitude. Even if the latter were possible, it is not clear that this somewhat glorified tabula rasa ideal should guide every specific enquiry.

The idea that realism must be normatively understood in responsible enquiry implies, rather, something like the following: Clearly, experts (and hence arbiters) in any field of enquiry have some view about how things are that, perhaps, tacitly underlies their research endeavors or, perhaps, is fully articulated. A position of expertise can not be achieved without such a view, the popularity of positivism notwithstanding. The guiding, intellectual purpose of *responsible* experts will be, in the end, to achieve as realistic an ontological stance as possible. This goal does not exclude an openness to the possibility that one's position might need to be abandoned or modified in light of wholly unexpected and, on the face of it, *unlikely* findings. Openness is centrally involved in the claim that realism is normative. The possibility always exists that thinkers and researchers of considerable renown may have to abandon their most cherished and most central conception of how things are in the face of new discoveries or because of an elaboration of novel points of view. (A conversion of this sort was demanded of Philip Gosse, who was incapacitated,

netics. Her findings were not "deemed sufficiently plausible" for recognition. (Evelyn Fox Keller, in *A Feeling For the Organism, The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* [New York: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1984], gives an insightful account of the scientific community's resistance to McClintock's work.)

as a scientist, by the impossibility of abandoning his most cherished views.)

Epistemic integrity is most strongly—indeed, heroically—evident in the ability to be a “fallibilist” in the Peircean sense, cognizant of one’s own potential fallibility even in the most painstakingly won conclusions, even in the conception of the nature of things that underlies them. The capacity to serve the intrinsic goods of the practice, to value a just perspective on how things are over and above one’s own reputation and prestige is a significant mark of intellectual virtue.

In scientific practice at its best, then, normative realism is apparent as the force that guides and shapes the progress of enquiry. In light of Polanyi’s plausible contention that “current beliefs about the *fundamental* nature of reality are the working context in which any change, even any novel change, is judged,”¹¹ it is especially important that these beliefs be responsibly developed. The need to maintain a balance persists in the face of constant tension between independent thought and institutionalized expertise. The received view, as represented by the structure and inner workings of scientific institutions, does indeed suppress apparent contradictions: yet it is in terms of this same view that ideas that might bring about drastic modifications within the structure are ultimately accepted. Polanyi thus states, “There is much that cannot be made explicit because it lies at the level of feelings about fitness and in working attitudes that betray an essentially imaginative grasp of how things in that field may be expected to work or to *be* Science is shaped by the delicate evaluations scientists make. . . . These judgments are tacit judgments . . . and always personal. But they are not whimsical.”¹²

It is not contradictory to claim both that a grasp of how things may work or be is “essentially imaginative” and that realism must be accorded normative force. (Connections with my discussion of literature and cognition are apparent here.) “Imaginative” is by no means equivalent to “fantastical.” An imaginative grasp of how things are is bound, always, to go beyond an immediate experience of reality, in a particular context, to a wider postulation

¹¹ Ibid., p. 189.

¹² Ibid., pp. 186–87.

of context and significance. This grasp is properly called “imaginative” since it goes beyond the actual content of experience; but it need not do so to the extent that it loses contact with experience or eludes the demand that it validate itself against experience. It need not defy the claims of realism.

One could go further and say that any search for a feeling of rightness when making something *of* an experience (a theory, a poem, a painting) is always imaginative since it involves a search for alternatives and possibilities that conform to or tie in with what is actual. Such a feeling is just that: a sense of things fitting into place. At its core is a balance between humility (construed not in a negative, Uriah Heep vein but as a positive openness to the intricate complexity of things) and a just estimation of one’s own degree of expertise. Humility stands as a safeguard against whimsicality in judgment. Imagination is accorded sufficient scope to see the world and one’s own efforts at achieving explanation in a wider context, but humility checks its possible excesses in either direction: toward whimsicality, or toward closed-minded dogmatism, tantamount to a failure of imagination.

Polanyi is right to maintain that “scientific originality springs from [that is, requires a basis or roots in] scientific tradition”¹³ while, at the same time, it aims to supersede that tradition. In his view, this relation to tradition, both of affirmation and of rejection, establishes a sense of personal responsibility that sustains a scientist’s intellectual quest. Hence, any picture of scientific activity that construes the human intellect as a passive ground for the proliferation of impressions would be plainly false. Such a view provides only a partial picture that underestimates the role of *choice* in this process. Decisions must repeatedly be made about the direction research can/will take. There is no one, univocal reality that scientists strive in some way to “match” with their theories. What there is is ambiguous, equivocal, open to many (ideally, but not always, constantly improving) interpretations.

Choices made during the course of any kind of enquiry are genuine choices, even though the object of enquiry is not of the enquirer’s own making. To be responsible choices, they must

¹³ Ibid., p. 192.

adapt to certain communal (that is, internal to the scientific—or other—community) criteria both of rightness and of validity. They must be coherent with ideas about reasonable routes to pursue and reasonable accounts of reality to maintain.¹⁴ Plainly, Polanyi's view is that scientific practice does, in fact, proceed in this way. His is, in this respect, a more charitable view of human nature than mine, perhaps because he is prepared to generalize from his own case, which does come across as one of responsible intellectual practice. His discussion confirms my view of how intellectual enquiry should proceed, but I am not persuaded that it always does proceed in this way. Even if baser motives such as undue allegiance to external goods in the form, perhaps, of fame or fortune are ignored, Polanyi's view presupposes a clarity of vision in practitioners in all practices that is by no means the norm in scientific practice or in cognitive endeavor in general.

Polanyi's is an articulate statement, none the less, about the role of epistemic responsibility and cognitive interdependence in scientific enquiry in particular and, by extension, in enquiry per se. It reinforces the epistemological point that, once knowing subjects are properly installed at the center of knowledge seeking, a refocused approach to evaluating knowledge claims is required. Assessing the degree to which certainty is approached or achieved is no longer as important as arriving at a reasoned assessment of the degree of responsibility underlying a claimant's commitment to his or her claims to know. Even if such claims can only achieve the status of probability rather than certainty, "responsibilist" considerations are central in assessing their worth.¹⁵

¹⁴Polanyi observes: "Originality is guided at every stage by a sense of responsibility for advancing the growth of truth in men's minds. Its freedom lies in this perfect service [that is, to 'realism' construed normatively]. . . . [A scientist's] acts are personal judgements exercised responsibly with a view to a reality with which he is seeking to establish contact" (ibid., p. 194).

¹⁵Polanyi maintains that: "The affirmation of a *probable* statement includes a judgement no less personal and no less directed by universal intent than an affirmation of *certainly* would include. Any conclusion, whether given as a surmise or claimed as a certainty, represents a commitment of the person who arrives at it. No one can utter more than a responsible commitment of his own, and this completely fulfills his responsibility for finding the truth and for telling it. Whether or not it is the truth can be hazarded only by another, equally responsible commitment" (Ibid., p. 194).

Polanyi's notion of "mutual authority" captures much of what I mean by an epistemic contract. Both are governed by a normative goal of achieving a realistic understanding of the world in which participants live and seek to know. The goal is sustained by a continuous process of mutual adjustment and criticism. In scientific enquiry, Polanyi describes the process as "a kind of moral association of persons [which], through the exercise of mutual authority, welds tradition and freedom together in pursuit of the truth. . . . [A]ctions of persons in this association are rendered responsibly universal in intent by a common belief in the existence of a reality, further and further aspects of which may be uncovered by these persons through their own origina-tive actions."¹⁶ What is true of science in this way is true of other forms of enquiry and of scholarly activity. It is one mark of a free society that this mutual criticism can exist.

Polanyi and/or Foucault

Polanyi's position contrasts interestingly with the view of human knowledge that emerges from the work of Michel Foucault, who also takes cognitive interdependence as a given, a fundamental fact of human existence and coexistence. He, too, believes that interdependence does not need to be established through argument, but philosophy does need to assess its implications. From his own assessment of these implications, he develops a view of cognitive interdependence that sees it as tantamount to *control* by established discourse within a particular community or institution in a particular period of history: control through language, understood as the *location* of knowledge.

There is no reason, according to Foucault's view, to assume that such control will be rational nor that rational grounds can be given for the particular forms discourse takes in specific epochs. The course of human cognitive, social, and institutional history is conceived of as an ineluctable process in which large-scale meanings change and shift with a certain inner momen-

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

tum. Individual knowers are swept along in this process with relatively little chance of standing out against it.

The relevance of Foucault to my discussion should now be obvious. If his central contentions are at all plausible, it is difficult to see how any great significance can be accorded to epistemic responsibility. The role of individual knowers seems to be simply to ride with the tide of established discourse.

In Foucault's view, human beings must try to cope with the materiality and the contingency of the world through the production of discourse (construed, in the broadest possible sense, to include talking, writing, and learned disquisitions on specific subject matters). Human beings *live* in discourse and, thus, in the process through which discourse shapes and seeks to control both the world and discourse itself. Foucault maintains that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to . . . procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and dangers."¹⁷ Discourse is a criterion not just for knowledge (that is, what one says, broadly construed, shows what one knows) but, indeed, for who one is: for instance, whether one is to be counted among the mad or the sane. A person is judged mad "if his speech [can]not be said to form part of the common discourse of men."¹⁸ To ensure one's membership in those (cognitive) groups to which one wants, and indeed needs, to belong, then, one must use the received discourse.

This claim amounts to the contention that human beings have a will to knowledge and truth that, given the structure of societies, relies upon institutional support. But this human will to knowledge is neither natural, spontaneous, nor unshaped. It is a manifestation of will that takes the shape it does and moves in the directions it does according to criteria of acceptable knowing established in the discourse of an era. Yet, Foucault's position is

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," reprinted in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Productions, 1972), p. 216.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 217. This is a central theme, also, in *Madness and Civilisation*, trans. R. Howard (London: Tavistock Press, 1967); and in *I, Pierre Riviere having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother . . .*, ed. Michel Foucault (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978).

no mere relativism. He does take discourse to have its own life, its own momentum, and one might initially think that this momentum will ultimately drive discourse into collision with reality, with disastrous consequences. According to Foucault, however, it does not, for reasons found in the difference between knowledge in the natural sciences and knowledge of human interaction, which I discussed in chapter 4. Foucault's central concern is with human reality: madness, sickness, criminology, sexuality. In these areas of enquiry, modes of knowing can unquestionably and significantly structure the aspect of reality under discussion; yet, it still remains an aspect of *reality*. Discourse, for all its momentum, is not without constraint by what is there to be known.

Foucault maintains that this will to knowledge emerged at the turn of the seventeenth century, especially in England. It "*imposed upon the knowing subject . . . a certain position, a certain viewpoint, and a certain function . . . which prescribed . . . the technological level at which knowledge could be employed in order to be verifiable and useful.*"¹⁹ The will to knowledge, dependent as it is upon institutional support, "tends to exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse."²⁰ A particular and well-known instance of such constraining force is scientism, whose influence is still strongly felt, for example, in approaches to cognition that equate "quantifiable" with "best," seeking to model epistemological methodology on the methodology of the natural sciences from an essentially positivistic conception of these sciences. (Such an approach meets with significant challenges from Kuhn and Feyerabend, as well as from Polanyi. In the writings of each of these philosophers, the tentativeness of human cognitive gropings is, variously, recognized; yet there is a willingness to call the products "knowledge" of the only sort human beings, arguably, can have.)

Despite the paradoxical consequences that seem to emerge from Foucault's views, his position deserves to be taken at least partially seriously. The crucial point is that there is, indeed, power inherent in knowledge, a power that can be exercised

¹⁹"The Discourse on Language," p. 218 (my emphasis).

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 219.

over those who do not know. This power, misused and abused, is manifest in totalitarian societies whose *modus operandi* is controlled ignorance. It is manifest, too, in situations where, for reasons of vested interest, findings about harmful effects of certain drugs—for instance, cortisone or estrogen—are suppressed to prevent financial loss in business enterprises. Here we find an intersection between epistemic and moral considerations where, in the worst rather than in the best sense, the former are used to control the latter.²¹

Even granting the force of this identification of power with discourse (and, hence, with institutionalized knowledge), one must allow that discourse is neither static nor fixed. It is ever in flux, even though this may be an internally and externally controlled flux. Control is never absolute, change does take place; and it is the patterns of such change Foucault seeks to trace. Yet he resists attributing the ability to institute such change to particular, individual authors of discourse, creators of new meanings; rather, he takes the author of change to be “the unifying principle in a particular group of writings or statements, lying at the origins of their significance, as the seat of their coherence.”²² He believes this principle worked differently in the Middle Ages, when it was vitally important to be able to attribute a scientific text to a specific author to assess its credibility. Then, he maintains, the norm was to ask whether the author was believable: “The author was the index of the work’s truthfulness. A proposition was held to derive its scientific value from its author.”²³ In Foucault’s view, the “great author principle” has evolved through the stage when it was “a principle of limitation in medical [and other?] discourse”²⁴ to the point where disciplines as areas of discourse are now somehow self-subsistent centers of control, where authors and creators are increasingly invisible.

Disciplines are distinct from MacIntyrean practices particu-

²¹On a more ordinary level, this concern presumably motivates Sisela Bok’s warning against the potential slippery slope effect of even the “whitest” of lies. (See *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, [New York: Pantheon Books, 1978].)

²²“The Discourse on Language,” p. 221.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 233.

larly because of this invisibility of practitioners and the concomitant, apparent futility of urging responsible standards of practice. Still, disciplines do impose criteria for discourse proper to that discipline. These criteria evolve with the discipline itself, so that what might at one time have been a proper medical or biological proposition can cease to be so, giving way to other, newly accepted forms of discourse with new criteria of acceptability. To belong to a discipline, a proposition must fit into a certain type of "theoretical field." "Within its own limits, every discipline recognises true and false propositions, but it repulses a whole teratology of learning. . . . Disciplines constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an identity taking the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules."²⁵ This control determines who can rightfully be admitted as a participant in the discourse of a discipline. One must fulfill certain conditions and give evidence of having certain qualifications if one's discourse is to count as a contribution to the discipline of science, medicine, or psychology—conditions and qualifications that themselves exist in discourse.

There is considerable truth in Foucault's claim that there is remarkably little freedom in discourse. To participate in a discourse is to be bound by a highly restrictive system, dependent upon "the functioning of a ritual that determines the individual properties and agreed roles of the speakers."²⁶ Such a ritual is sustained through educational systems in the form of doctrine, with implications I shall discuss more fully in the next section of this chapter. Indeed, educational systems, as Foucault sees them, are "political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it."²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 223–24.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 227.

²⁷ Ibid. On a purely *ad hominem* but by no means facetious basis, one might well ask whether there is something purely French about such a view: something that shows that its author has long felt the force of the Académie Française as a body that controls what can properly be said. This question does not minimize the importance of Foucault's observations—to have them, possibly, "explained away" if their origin could thus be traced would be to commit a genetic fallacy. It is interesting, though, to speculate upon their origin, for the Académie does indeed exercise a control *par excellence* over what can count as discourse across disciplines.

Totalitarian regimes throughout the world and throughout history bear witness to the measure of truth in this contention. But an acknowledgment that such a potential exists in institutions that disseminate knowledge, from the popular press to the universities, neither entails the conclusion that all such institutions will use their power ruthlessly nor that the proper role of the rest of the population is to be complacent bystanders or fellow travelers. Foucault's intention is not to demonstrate that there are no choices. He is arguing that, as we too well know, choice, dissent, and change are exceedingly difficult to achieve.

Foucault's point is not to advocate passive acquiescence to the momentum of discourse, rather, he urges both awareness of and resistance to its power to sweep knowers and events along on an impersonal tide. It would therefore be quite reasonable to construe this call for resistance as the form exhortations to responsible epistemic practice take in his thinking, even though it is not at all clear that he could, on his own terms, address this call to individual knowers. Nonetheless, he sets out three specific imperatives: "to question our will to truth; to restore to discourse its character as an event; to abolish the sovereignty of the signifier."²⁸ These clearly are cognitive imperatives, pertinent to questions about epistemic responsibility.

Indeed, despite some difficulty in making room for a concept of normative realism in Foucault's way of thinking, which is based firmly upon the conviction that "saying makes it so," there is at least one place where the possibility of normative realism is implied. Foucault writes: "We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity."²⁹ Yet he does not go on to offer a methodology for analyzing or understanding the nature of this violence, let alone for undoing or reversing it. It may be that he takes it simply as a fact, a feature of discourse per se that must be recognized but need not be evaluated. Even when we grant that awareness of the effective and affective cognitive interrelation between human beings and the world is an improvement upon

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

otherwise blind acquiescence, then, it is not entirely clear what this awareness can amount to or lead to in Foucault's scheme.

People are swept along on the tide of this "violence." Beliefs manifested in discourse are no more rational than the medieval (and later) belief in the Divine Right of Kings. Indeed, the moral to be drawn, whether rightly or wrongly, from the histories Foucault writes is that beliefs current now or in the past about madness, medicine, or sexuality are fundamentally *irrational*. "Irrational" as the term is used here, is not to be contrasted with beliefs that are rational and, indeed, true because they are based upon well-established evidence, seemingly infallible, likely to be true for all time and all circumstances. Nor is "irrational" to be equated with "foolish," "wild," or "whimsical" any more for Foucault than (though the terminology is different) for Polanyi. The term refers, rather, to unseen emotional *and* intellectual forces at work in human psyches and societies that give momentum to shifting patterns of discourse.³⁰ In sum, Foucault's view seems to be that all institutions and all disciplines are governed by ideologies and that all ideology is irrational.

It is far from clear, though, that there is no choice but to accept the governance of ideology as ineluctable. Given Foucault's concession to the value of awareness, his views do not lead to a *prima facie* negation of the requirements of epistemic responsibility. Even if he is right that we are less rational than we have long prided ourselves upon being, this does not mean that all virtuous intellectual endeavor is for naught. My claim at the end of chapter 6 still holds. Even within the confines of the situation Foucault describes, there is room to pose and to find better or worse answers to the question: "What sort(s) of discourse does the situation really call for?"

Foucault's diverse genealogical studies are particularly valuable in loosening the absolutist hold of much of traditional epistemology and in pointing out its historicist implications. This step is an important one toward seeing human cognitive en-

³⁰ As Hilary Putnam puts it: "Foucault is not arguing that past practices were *more* rational than they look to be, but that all practices are *less* rational, are, in fact, mainly determined by unreason and selfish power" (in *Reason, Truth and History*, p. 162).

deavor within its limitations. Foucault shows us that rationality is not an abstraction with a permanent, absolute form or content; but neither is it wholly bounded by discourse. By a route quite different from Polanyi's, Foucault shows the need to reinstate responsible thinkers in a centrally normative role in intellectual life and points out both the necessity and the relevance of a conception of intellectual virtue (also evolving rather than static) to guide the thoughts and judgment of such thinkers. His most important insight is that we do "violence" to things through discourse. The clear implication of this point is that it matters which discourse we adopt and which discourse is granted priority.

At the basis of Foucault's work is the belief that language is quite improperly regarded as a given, as a tool into whose use we are born, or led, from early childhood. Language is no neutral mediator between ourselves and the world; no structure through which our experience is filtered but by which experience itself remains wholly untouched. At levels of discourse beyond the simplest, most commonsense ("This is a cup") levels, in more nebulous regions where the larger part of human speaking takes place, there are choices about how experience is to be put into words. Human beings are responsible for these choices. On a purely epistemic level, we are forever faced with the challenge to articulate experience as well as possible (where "well" means more than just "accurately").

On a moral level, ways of speaking about things have far-reaching effects for how they are regarded and treated. If violence is inevitable, care must be taken to control and mitigate it. The point is brought out vividly, illustrating just how much power discourse has in structuring reality in a more everyday context than those Foucault studies, in the abortion issue. We are well acquainted with the rhetoric that debate on this matter constantly evokes and with the difference it can make to one's stance on the issue to think of the entity whose removal is contemplated as a "blob of tissue" or as a "potential human being." Again, it is morally and epistemically significant in discussions of euthanasia whether one speaks of "killing" or of "letting die"; and it makes a difference to what people are prepared to accept whether news-

papers report “pacification” (of the Viet Cong or the Huns) or “bombing to bits.” Foucault is right to insist that differences in terminology are not merely matters of semantics, for descriptions have far-reaching consequences within cognitive and moral practice. Nor can these differences be dismissed as merely rhetorical *precisely because of these consequences*. There is a place for moral and epistemic judgments within the domain of rhetoric: there is good rhetoric and bad rhetoric, both in its moral and in its epistemic implications.

So far, this discussion is consistent with the spirit, if not the letter, of Foucault’s project, but certain troublesome queries now arise. If Foucault is indeed wholly committed to the view that the cognitive process is so impersonal, then one must wonder to what knowers his writings are meant to be addressed. It is difficult to understand how we, as individual knowers, are to see through the structures and workings of power-knowledge to resist its seemingly inexorable operations. Indeed, if, as he claims in *The History of Sexuality*, *Discipline and Punish*, and *Madness and Civilisation*, individuals are constituted through knowledge but are not themselves the bearers or creators of knowledge, then there seems to be no point at all in ostensibly addressing his observations to such creatures. Clearly, there are such difficulties here that matters of epistemic responsibility might seem to be more appropriately discussed within the framework of Polanyi’s position.

What Foucault might be offering is a more realistic assessment of what individuals are able, in fact, to do in the face of the way power-knowledge structures operate in contemporary societies. To accept this assessment is not, however, to allow that acquiescence is, after all, the only course. There is room even here for a reading of the demands of epistemic responsibility, located in collective rather than in individual endeavor. Collective endeavor is, increasingly, the most effective mode of resistance in contemporary society. Power-knowledge structures constitute people as categories—as homosexuals, women, blacks, mad people—defined and publicly understood according to rigid, stereotyped designations. Such people do have the capacity and can develop the power either to fight back together *as* that category or collec-

tively to work at repudiating the confinement of the categorization and at deconstructing its implications. Collective endeavor of this kind can clearly be an exercise in epistemic responsibility. In fact, often, in mass society, it seems to be its most potentially effective manifestation.

Thinking individuals have a responsibility to monitor and watch over shifts in, changes in, and efforts to preserve good intellectual practice. Not everyone is either physically able or intellectually equipped to watch over all areas; hence, the necessity for a division of intellectual labor, with the responsibilities this division entails both for experts and for those inclined to take experts at their word. Such a division should not be seen as an excusing feature of epistemic community for those who prefer to ride with the tide. In principle, everyone is responsible, to the extent of his or her ability, for the quality of cognitive practice in a community.

This discussion indicates that the best position is one midway between Polanyi's and Foucault's with regard to the possibilities of cognitive creativity within an epistemic community. Such a stance would avoid the at-times excessive optimism of Polanyi and the at-times excessive pessimism of Foucault. The Polanyi model seems best to fit the kind of exercise necessary to monitor intellectual procedures within disciplines, keeping intellectual practice in order by performing one's professional duties well. It offers a method of vigilance for detecting abuses and misuses of the privileges of professional status. But we need the Foucault model as well to remind us of just how the power of disciplines extends beyond what Polanyi has told us, hence demanding a different kind of responsible reaction and, often, resistance.

The minimal stance required to do justice to the complexity of cognitive enterprise is one which would acknowledge the broad range of perspectives language reflects. It would allow that the ways in which objects are known clearly reflect the conceptual schemes of knowers and communities of knowers. Systems of discourse, schemes of description, modes of analysis do, to a point, designate their own objects. Historically, a DNA molecule comes into existence as an object of knowledge within a specific cognitive structure. Yet it would be perverse to claim that it was

not there prior to the moment when it became part of a body of knowledge. A free-floating, “anything goes” kind of “lingualism” (to borrow Ian Hacking’s useful phrase)³¹ would make nonsense of the scientific and cognitive enterprise, where both creativity and discovery are constantly evident. Objects are named, designated, classified, and described according to the ways the world impinges upon human consciousness. Human consciousness makes its own contribution to these structurings and has the capacity to do so self-critically and responsibly.

Behind all of this structuring, there remains a question about epistemic responsibility discernible both in Polanyi’s and in Foucault’s positions. The question involves whether or to what extent, as knower, one has *obligations* to a conceptual scheme as such and what the role of a community of users *should* be in this respect. In practice, this role is not purely conservative, or else there would have been none of the shifts and changes in conceptual schemes with which both Foucault and Polanyi are, variously, concerned. But questions about what the role should be are especially pertinent in contemporary society, with its dependence upon experts. I do not claim that ordinary individuals have no responsibilities simply because the likelihood of their being heard and recognized by disciplines in their institutional strongholds is not great. My point, rather, is that an epistemic community will be strong in intellectual virtue only if good knowing is valued as a condition of human flourishing, whether individually or collectively.

Three points are of central importance in summing up this discussion. First, there are discernible reasons why and how particular thinkers fall short of, or approach, ideals of good knowing. Second, we do have a regulative, normative idea of a just, attentive, and balanced intellect and of epistemic responsibility implicit in our more careful judgments of intellectual effort. Finally, the fact that there is no way of ultimately resolving disputes to everyone’s satisfaction does not require us to declare that there is no better or worse way. Actions can be judged laud-

³¹ See Ian Hacking, *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 174.

able, or less than perfect, in a number of specific respects even without spelling out the characteristics of perfection in definitive detail; such judgement can be just as valid for cognitive actions as for moral actions, for skills, or for other more purely practical forms of activity that admit of qualitative degree.

Education, Authority, and the Epistemic Community

Educational systems are special examples of how the authority of epistemic community manifests itself and the power of received discourse is felt.³² Because of the extent of its influence, it is evident that for intellectual virtue to flourish within a community, an honorable, quasi-contractual agreement must underlie institutionalized educational practice and sustain its epistemic ideals. Here is not the place to enter into the development of a full-fledged philosophy of education and of the authority relations within educational systems. I wish only to draw attention to certain, fundamental considerations that set the tone for the epistemic responsibility a community can manifest.

It would be foolish to minimize the role of educational systems and philosophies of education in establishing and maintaining cognitive standards. A necessary first step in understanding this role and its potential implications and dangers is to define quite clearly the assumptions that underlie the institutionalization of epistemic authority in educational systems.

Of primary importance is the distinction between being “in” authority and being “an” authority.³³ I have maintained that there is epistemic value in justifiable—and justified—respect for outstanding exemplars of epistemic integrity: for authorities properly so called. It is a well-known fact, however, that not all persons *in* authority, whether in epistemic authority or in au-

³² Cf. Foucault's characterization of educational systems as “political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse” (“The Discourse on Language,” p. 227, also cited previously).

³³ I owe this distinction to Helen Freeman. See her paper “Authority, Power and Knowledge: Politics and Epistemology in the New Sociology of Education,” *Philosophy of Education*, 1980, Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society (Normal, Illinois: Illinois State University, 1981).

thority of any other kind, are *authorities* in any proper sense of the word. This point requires urgent consideration in the area of education, where those subject to the authority of supposed “authorities” are, as often as not, in no position to resist; often, at the lowest levels, they are in no position even to recognize the need to resist should it arise. Indeed, it is a presupposition of the very notion of education that resistance to being “led out” is perverse and actually subversive of the enterprise. The point is that the potential evils of education—its capacity to misuse power—can only be corrected by concerted community effort, which will be ineffective unless it explicitly recognizes qualitative differences between types of authority.

Reflection upon responsibility in education must recognize how spheres of influence are established and maintained and be aware of the degree of infallibility those whose influence is strongest feel bound to claim for themselves (much depends upon the degree of their intellectual honesty). Persons in authority are in a position to *make* something be true or false: to *declare* all forms of evolutionary theory, for example, to be false while maintaining the truth of creationism against all odds. It is not likely, though, that blatant untruths could be maintained forever except in repressive, totalitarian regimes, and perhaps not even there. The truth does seem to have a certain momentum about it, so that it will come out as long as receptive persons are there to acknowledge it. Nonetheless, persons in authority are in a position to impose their definitions upon a situation so that future action is shaped by these definitions. The point is illustrated every time a schoolchild claims to know that something is the case because his or her teacher said so. One of the most important and difficult steps in learning who can be trusted is realizing that authority cannot create truth.

I do not mean that one should accept nothing upon authority nor that the most responsible course would be to disband educational institutions and send everyone off, from earliest infancy, upon a solitary cognitive journey. Such a course would be unreasonable, of minimal cognitive value, and, in actual practice, impossible. There are innumerable situations, at all stages of life, where one wants to know and the obvious and quite rational

procedure is to consult those whom one considers to be authorities. It is rational, too, to believe what they say, at least to the extent that one has good reason to think they are worthy sources of knowledge and no reason to think that their “informed” pronouncements are made only for the sake of serving a special interest. Such consultation is a matter of course in everyday cognitive practice and implies neither that authorities are to be regarded as infallible nor that authority has the last word.

Yet the situation is curiously ambiguous. Often one consults authorities intending to believe them, but often, too, one wants to know what another person thinks in order to know what one does not want to think. The role of experts sometimes is to be agents of articulation, expressers of points of view that they can make clearer. Whether one is inclined to agree or not is sometimes beside the point. This need for articulation does not apply only to philosophical positions as such, but also to the sort of information one seeks from scientists and specialists in other disciplines, who interpret the meaning of scientific (and other) discourse by filtering it through a certain world view. What they say is valuable in spelling out the (perhaps unacceptable) implications of this view.

Authority, as it evolves out of rule-governed situations (whether academic or other), tends to seem increasingly impersonal. Hence it is important to remain mindful of the fact that rules are products of human creativity, discovery, and established convention. They are neither impersonal nor God given. It would be quite wrong to consider teachers as simply neutral, as automatic (*ex officio*) reliable mediators between students and public knowledge. To do so would be to conceal the personal influence and authority of teachers behind a screen of rules, regulations, and institutionalized practices that then become the authorities in the teacher's place.³⁴ People, not rules, are ultimately the authorities

³⁴ Institutions (e.g., teachers, professors, colleagues, journal editorial boards, granting agencies) are in a position, often, to *decide* what will count as a science, philosophy, or art. Freeman observes, “If we want our activities to be accepted as science or philosophy in the institutionalized communities of scientists or philosophers, we must either accept the rules of the activity as currently engaged in, or we must persuade or otherwise get those who are already participating in the wider community to modify their criteria so that we can be included. Whether or

whether legitimately or not. If challenges are called for, one must challenge people, not rules. Emphasis upon the authority of rules *per se* serves only to mystify people subject to those rules and, indeed, to absolve those who stand behind them of a responsibility that is properly theirs.

My aim is not to urge anarchy but to encourage vigilance and wariness against conceptual construals that conceal the real facts of the case. I am thus reiterating the importance of normative realism. Circumspection is of the greatest importance in cognitive life, together with awareness of the way authority functions both in education and in expertise more widely construed. It is important to be mindful of the complexity of cognitive situations, which cannot reasonably be understood simply as rule-following, and of the need to be responsible both in one's acceptance of authority and in recognizing when one need not defer to authority because one can find out for oneself.

A theory of education in which authority is a matter of impersonal rule-following would have to operate with a truncated conception of the nature of human beings, for whose benefit the system, ostensibly, exists. The implication would be that people can be classified and manipulated in certain ways, like pieces in a game of chess, pushed or led through the system according to certain preconceived goals. In such a de-personalized process, questions of responsibility would arise only within a very narrow scope. In consequence, any discussion about whether persons either *in* authority or *subject to* authority are rightfully and responsibly seen in this way would be set aside. The dictates of responsible knowing enjoin us to make our best efforts to find out, for example, whether intelligence and personality are biological attributes to the extent that human beings can appropriately be dealt with as categories or types to whom rules, like natural laws,

not our activities are regarded as 'legitimately' science or philosophy is not a matter of our private decision" (op. cit., p. 86). It would be erroneous to conclude that no one makes this decision but rather the work either meets or fails to meet a set of purely impersonal criteria. The authority rests in the people "who have the right to decide whether our activities are to be counted as instances or not" (p. 86); someone makes the decision as to how the work fits in. It is thus vital that authority be justifiably established and maintained.

straightforwardly apply. But there is no more reason to assume such biological determinism than there is to assume that each person is utterly idiosyncratic in knowing. A theory of human nature that takes the capacity for responsibility, both in authorities and in those subject to their authority, as a working hypothesis avoids certain ideological constraints and can hence acknowledge the moral implications inherent in educational practice.

The hold and influence of education are by no means absolute. To make epistemic responsibility dependent upon rational rejection of the irrationalities permeating an entire educational fabric would impose an impossibly rigorous standard. Rare individuals have the insight, understanding, and courage to resist the stronghold of tradition: such were the philosophers who were able to bear the pain and loneliness of turning their back on the images in Plato's cave and facing the light, however unbearable. These individuals can urge others to follow; hence the normative value of the ideal *character*, the genuine exemplar of intellectual virtue. But it would be unreasonable to demand that all human knowers, including all teachers, authorities, and experts, exhibit or strive to attain such extraordinary standards. Efforts in this direction—mindfulness on the part of each individual knower of his or her responsibility and fallibility both in seeking and in claiming knowledge—are to be urged and applauded. More cannot reasonably be asked.

Cherished beliefs pose formidable bastions of opposition to epistemic change. In fact, there is an undeniable tension here, for a responsible attitude to knowledge and belief in general is manifested, in part, in *caring* about what one claims to believe or know. People for whom believing or not believing, knowing or not knowing, are matters of indifference are unlikely to meet even the least stringent requirements of epistemic responsibility. But caring too much, holding on too tenaciously in the face of contradictory evidence, is as bad as caring too little. We are led, in the end, to see just how apposite is Aristotle's doctrine of the mean.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

In this book, I have argued that cognitive interdependence is a fact of human existence and have discussed some of the responsibilities that accrue to human beings in view of this fact: responsibilities that pervade human cognitive life from the most banal to the most esoteric of domains. Because of the essentially interactive nature of human cognitive life, questions of epistemic responsibility pose themselves urgently, if often only implicitly, in all human exchange—again, from the most banal (except for conventional greetings such as “How are you?” where no genuine response is required or expected) to the most esoteric. In making these questions explicit, I have shown both the importance of posing and seeking answers to them and the need to broaden epistemological enquiry so that the cognitive circumstances of knowers become as important in evaluating knowledge claims as are the claims themselves.

Some of these circumstances have been singled out for special attention. I have shown that knowing well is as much a moral as it is an epistemological matter, and have argued that the exemplary conduct of characters of intellectual virtue gives us some idea about how knowing well is best achieved. In developing a concept of intellectual virtue, I have shown that virtue needs to be brought within the range of human possibility, that we need to understand that range, and that we can move toward under-

standing through a socialized approach to epistemology. A study of human cognitive agency shows that human beings are essentially social and leads one to see that knowledge acquisition, as an activity of such beings, is a communal activity. Intellectual virtue manifests itself in communities that impose constraints and conditions upon acceptable knowledge seeking at the same time as they make that activity possible. Such constraints are by no means absolute, however, for knowledge claims must be justifiable as much in view of how things are in the world as in view of the human creativity out of which they are formulated. There is hence a constant pressure to achieve a realistic view of the world, even in moving away from empiricism, as Wittgenstein reminds us in the passage from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* quoted in chapter 1.

In developing this position, I do not claim to have countered scepticism as it is articulated by the sceptic who denies that we can have any knowledge of the world. Nor have I refuted the sceptic who allows that there can be knowledge of the everyday constraints that are imposed upon our activities by the environment but maintains that, beyond these relatively uninteresting possibilities, there can be no knowledge. I have rather taken a fairly broadly defined realism as a working hypothesis in order to consider some of the imperatives realism, thus construed, imposes upon cognitive conduct.

I have not offered a *theory* of knowledge in the form of a system of epistemological principles wherein the less general are derived from the more general. Instead, I have proposed a different way of thinking about epistemological questions, rooted in certain truths about human nature and the structures of human institutions and working toward the development of reflective practice. What emerges, I hope, is a “self-critical, non-intellectual and socially responsible”¹ way of posing some of the questions that need to be posed, imaginatively, about the place of cognitive activity in human life.

It will not become irrelevant, in consequence of such a shift in

¹The phrase is Annette Baier's from her “Doing Without Moral Theory?” in *Postures of the Mind*, p. 238.

epistemological emphasis, to attempt to justify the knowledge claims one makes or is called upon to evaluate; nor will the importance of making one's knowledge coherent be diminished. Absolute foundations and perfect coherence may be impossible, but reasonable foundations (that is, foundations established as well as possible) are a rational requirement of claims to know, as is achieving the best coherence possible. Yet, coherence and foundations, to whatever degree they can be achieved, are only part of the story a theory of knowledge needs to tell. What is known is just one aspect of a complex process of human interaction with other people and with the world.

It is the nature of this refocused approach to epistemology that its results are not precise, specific, or definitive; but this is all to the good. Progress, and the possibility of achieving understanding, are often impeded by false hopes of precision and absoluteness. In this alternative perspective, understanding becomes the primary goal, in spite of the impossibility of bringing it to perfection.

It is conceivable, though not likely, that human cognitive endeavor will ultimately emerge triumphant, having attained truth and perfect understanding. This ideal is shared by Plato and Peirce alike. Whether or not the ideal is achievable, it is valid, humanly, morally, and epistemically, to retain it as a goal as long as it does not lead philosophers to erect criteria of the known, knowable, and real that exclude central aspects of human cognitive experience from their stipulated areas of consideration. Courage is as much an intellectual virtue as any other in this context, for it requires courage to become reconciled to dealing in areas where certainty is not possible, where the subject matter is amorphous and, to a great extent, unmanageable, and where the kind of understanding that can be reached will fall far short of perfect understanding. On all sides, one is faced with the fact of one's own fallibility, of human fallibility in general, and of the need to acknowledge this fallibility if better understanding is to be achieved. These are the demands of epistemic responsibility.

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Having adequate knowledge of the world is not just a matter of survival but also one of obligation. This obligation to "know well" is what philosophers have termed "epistemic responsibility." In this innovative and eclectic study, Lorraine Code explores the possibilities inherent in this concept as a basis for understanding human attempts to know and understand the world and for discerning the nature of intellectual virtue. By focusing on the idea that knowing is a creative process guided by imperatives of epistemic responsibility, Code provides a fresh perspective on the theory of knowledge.

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This edition of *Epistemic Responsibility* includes a new preface from Lorraine Code.

Lorraine Code is Distinguished Research Professor Emerita of Philosophy at York University, Canada. She is the author of several books, including *Manufactured Uncertainty: Implications for Climate Change Skepticism*, also published by SUNY Press, and *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*.

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